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Skunk River Review

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Skunk River Review January 1992, vol 3

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SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

VOLUME III

JANUARY 1992

Skunk River Review is a collection of student writing published once a year by The Des Moines Area Community College.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing the introduction for another volume of the *Skunk River Review*—the third time around—was a challenge. After all, what do you need to know other than here are some student essays for you to read and enjoy? With that thought in mind, we tried to anticipate typical questions you might have:

What is the Skunk River Review?

The *Skunk River Review* is a collection of nonfiction DMACC student essays. All writing was produced for DMACC classes in 1990-1991. Most essays were written for Composition I or II; however, student work from Basic Writing, Writing Skills Review, and Mass Media is also represented in this year's edition.

When you open these pages what you'll read are not always "perfect," polished, professional-type essays. Some will be, of course. But others will have areas that still need work, or at least aspects that could stand some tinkering.

So why publish them in this year's Skunk River Review? And what is writing from courses other than composition doing in here?

We believe all the essays included deserve to be read and appreciated in some way. The writers have worked hard on them, and their efforts show. Chances are you will usually find a reason to keep reading as you go through the book.

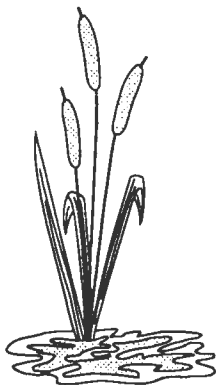
We read whatever is submitted to us. But you're right, "essays" typically are written for composition courses. We try, though, to look at each submission as an individual entry. Ultimately, our final decision is based on the principle *good writing is good writing*.

So do all submissions get in?

No, unfortunately. We're limited by space and printing costs. (This year 26 out of 74 total entries made the final cut.) Our decision is based on the quality of writing (which is almost always superior) and the type of writing it is—we try to include writing which represents a variety of rhetorical situations.

What am I supposed to do with the Skunk River Review?

Browse, critique, read cover-to-cover—it's up to you. Your teacher may assign certain essays as part of the course reading, but we would like you to use it however you want. The essays aren't meant to serve as "models" for you to imitate (although you may be tempted to in some cases). They are successful pieces—for a variety of reasons—written by students like you, individuals with a unique perspective who engaged the writing process until they found their voices—voices we think you should hear.



What a Worm!

Linda Kloss-Fitzgibbon
Basic Writing

Tonight is the night. Giddy with excitement; stimulated by fear; and, invigorated with my own defiance, I have made up my mind to "do it." In 1957 only the bad girls from the flats (the small houses down below the Karl King bridge) do such a thing. Certainly, not good girls from neighborhoods such as mine. But, I have met a new group of friends at school, and they are so cool. Not hicks like my neighborhood friends from the Western suburbs of Fort Dodge, Iowa.

I am a fourteen year old girl. Too thin, too short, and kind of nerdy. My parents won't let me do anything. They won't let me date, party, or dance. Dad had a fit just because I wore high heels to church. And, they especially do not want me to hang out at the roller skating rink with those greasy hoods. (As they refer to the guys who hang out there.) What squares. Actually, I too am considered a square, but I won't be after tonight.

Monday through Friday, I board the dirty, ugly, yellow bus that takes me on a bumpy, screaming sweaty ride north of town to school, and back home again. When I enter the house, I flick the tube to American Bandstand. Then I clean, cook, study, and dream of growing up fast, and getting my own place. Unlike other mothers, my mom works, so I am just a slave in this house. Dad won't even let me watch the Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show of Shows. He refers to them as, "Those damned queers from England who shake their damned long hair all over."

All my arguing, begging, pleading, and lying didn't work this time. In order to con my folks into letting me spend the night at my new friend Shirley's house, I had to clean the kitchen; do the ironing; and kiss-up to the whole family, including my two younger, disgusting, sisters. Oh well, a small price to pay for freedom on a Friday night in May.

While waiting in front of the school building for Shirley and her boyfriend, Fritz, to cruise by and pick me up, I vacillate between riding the bus or carrying out my plan for the evening. Maybe I really shouldn't go with them. Some of the things I have heard about these guys scare me a little. Well, truthfully, it terrifies me.

Suddenly, a shiny long and low, orange and white, Ford Victoria convertible squeals to a sudden halt in front of me. The bus riders enviously stare at me as I jump into the rod, which has been customized with black pinstriping and flames of fire around the headlights and pointed fins. The right rear fin has been painted with the names of "Shirley and Fritz" in artistic, bold, black swirls. We burn rubber as we tear out of the circle drive. Large black and white fuzzy dice dance around the rear-view mirror. God we are tough!

We reach Shirley's modern home in the country. Her folks are so cool. They let the kids party and drink right in their own house. Of course, Mom doesn't know this. Nor does she know that Shirley's two older sisters *had* to get married, and that she has gone all the way with Fritz. Fritz is older. He quit school to work in a body shop full-time. What I wouldn't give to be in Shirley's shoes.

In the bedroom, my friend lets me use her heavy make-up which will conceal my zits. Dark, thick, mascara is globbed onto my eyelashes next to my vivid, black outlined, frosted shadowed, green eyes. White frosted lipstick pales my lips, with nails painted to match. A fog of Revlon Intimate perfume atomizes my hair, and any visible part of my body and clothes. Breck hard-to-hold hairspray chokes and fumigates the air. Could it be? I gleefully see a strong resemblance to Priscilla Presley as I look in the mirror. If only there were enough time for an Elvis black dye job on my long hair.

After padding my wired, uplifted bra, I put on my pal's fluffy, low-cut, lavender, lambswool sweater. Next, I squeeze into a pair of black, skin tight, toreador stirrup pants. We stand back and admire each other. She, with her bleached blonde beehive piled several inches up from her tiny brow. Me, with my dark brunette ponytail pulled up high off the

crown of my head. I still look shorter than my five foot, juvenile frame next to her sophisticated, tall, svelte posture. I must admit though, I now look more like one of the gang. If only we could dress this way for school. My folks would just faint if they could see me. Why don't they just get with the program?

Wildly, we take off to Steelman's Roller Skating Rink which is east on Highway 20. The three of us join the Big Bopper as he howls through the crackling speakers from the back of the ragtop:

*Chantilly Lace and a pretty face and a ponytail
hanging down. A wiggle when you walk. A
giggle when you talk makes the world go round,
round, round.*

*There ain't nothing in the world like a big-eyed
girl, that makes you act so funny. Makes you
spend your money. Makes you feel real loose, like
a long-necked goose. Oh baby, YOU KNOW
WHAT I LIKE!*

We purchase our admission tickets. Camel smokes (for use in the bathroom later) are concealed in our purses. Sitting at the long, hard, wooden bench, we slip our white stocking covered feet into the white leather skates with wooden wheels. Shirley's skates have full, fluffy, pink, angora pom-poms attached at the toes; my skates look naked without any adornment. Only dirty, white, rubber toe-stops extend from dry, cracked, overly polished, leather boots for my embarrassment.

Gliding across the shining oak floor, a gush of forced air blows my bangs back from my sweaty brow as I search among the long oval of skaters for him. What if he didn't come? He just has to be here. How can I ever work up the nerve to go through all this again?

What if my nose gets in the way? Worse yet, what if I were to get knocked up? The band director's daughter got "knocked" by doing it the French way. It's been heard around school that some guys gave her Spanish Fly and

they had to peel her off of the gear shift of their car. She ended up having a miscarriage. Now, the guys call her "dropsy." What a bad reputation she has. My corny dad says, "Guard your reputation Linda. You only get one. No amount of money can ever buy you another." What a cube.

Here comes Lester now. Strutting by me on his black skates. At first it was his twin brother, LeRoy, that I liked; but, I've changed my mind. His shiny blond hair has been slicked back into a pointed ducktail gleaming under the spotlights. He is wearing a black leather motorcycle jacket over a white tee-shirt. Legs of hard muscle protrude against his tight, faded, bluejeans. My heart is pounding a hole through my chest. He winks my way, while chewing on a toothpick. I act surprised to see him, and glance behind me to make sure that I don't run into someone. Clicking the wheels of my skates, I show off my stuff while doing the backward, double twostep.

The voice on the loudspeaker instructs everyone to leave the floor for the moonlight skate. Why do I feel tension as the lights are brought down low, and Lester asks me to skate? He grips my waist with his large hands, as I raise my arms to lay my narrow, painted, fingertips upon his shoulders. He smells wild; a mixture of cloved breath, Vitalis hair tonic, and stale cigarette smoke. The anticipation of what is to come makes me dizzy. The feel of a boy near me this way is excitingly new, and overpowers any common sense I may have remaining.

After several sessions around the rink, and a lot of flirting and teasing, we remove our skates and walk shyly outside to sit in his buddy's old Chevrolet coupe. Now is where I will find answers to my questions. Many times I have practiced for this moment with a pillow in front of the mirror. How else is one to get experience? Fleetinglly, the thought of running back inside crosses my mind.

Now Lester holds me close. He touches me in places I didn't plan on being touched by someone else. (Does he detect the Kleenex in my bra?) Things don't feel right anymore, so I push him away. He pulls me back to him; finally bringing his rough lips down against mine in what

one might call a kiss. There, I have finally done it. I have finally kissed a boy. Is that all there is to it? All that hard work, manipulation and lying for this. He feels my lack of interest, and sneers at me as he belittles me by exclaiming, "You kiss like a worm."

Mixed feelings of relief and embarrassment flow through me as I escape from the car, and flee back to the rink. Did he expect experience in things other than a kiss? Would all the boys expect this? I just wanted to have a boyfriend and learn how to kiss. I really am such a hick. I must have been crazy to get into this mess. I know I am in over my head. I should call my dad. He has this wise advice, "Linda, you can always carry a dime for a phone call home, or else just walk or run away from trouble." Finally, I understand his repeated warnings.

However, all thoughts of calling my father completely leave my mind as soon as I rejoin the gang. I have crossed the line that will take me from the safety and security of my home in a desperate search for independence. Daring to discover and experience further excitement, I am already contriving an escape . . . for next Friday.



The Snowfall

Frances Evans
Basic Writing

After my mother's death, darkness fell upon my spirit. I isolated myself in order to hide the hurt and devastating fears that were dormant inside me. It wasn't until an enchanting snowfall that I could free myself from the hurt.

Following my mother's death, Mary 11, John 7, Bobby 4, and I, soon to be fifteen, came to live with our other brother Mike, his wife and their five children. They lived on a farm in St. Charles, Iowa. I always went to bed early and got up late trying to avoid as much participation with family members as possible. Any thought of joy would bring to mind the vision of my mother's face and the painful memory of watching it grow motionless and cold, never to smile again. I allowed myself to be hurt over and over again by the memories until I no longer had control of the dark emotions that stripped me from any possible happiness; I felt more and more dejected each time I thought of her.

My oldest brother tried to cheer me up by telling me how nice the farm was. He said, "Whenever you like, just let me know and I'll saddle a horse for you, and you can ride around the farm and get to know the place." I tried to protect myself by ignoring his attempts to relieve my sorrow. There was never a time in the past that my brother couldn't make me laugh but this time was different. It was strange. My facial muscles no longer responded so I tried to smile by parting my lips slightly, revealing my teeth enough for him to see. He knew how difficult it was for me to smile and with an unnerved look on his face, he left me alone, and that was all I wanted anyway.

Often my baby brother Bobby would come into my room. One day he came in excitedly saying, "There are new baby pigs in the barn. Do you want to see them?" I closed my eyes and shook my head no. "Come and play with us," he begged. I opened my eyes and looked at him wanting so desperately to say yes, but all I could do was cry. I felt sorry for him. He

ran out of the room; I could hear his voice from a distance saying, "She's crying again."

Early one morning I lay in bed reading over and over again letters I had received from my grandmother, wondering why she never discussed how she missed my mother. I heard my older brother Mike's footsteps in the hallway. I pulled my pillow over my head and pretended to be asleep. I heard the door open. His voice startled me, "Get up, I want to show you something!" I groaned pretending not to have heard him. He pulled me out of bed by my feet and I landed on my hands like a cat to keep from feeling the impact of the fall on the varnished floor. I did not fuss about leaving my room; I gave up without a word and followed him down the long, dimly lit hallway toward the living room. I had almost forgotten how to walk. My feet sprang from the floor, and I came down hard on my heels. I couldn't determine how far to put my feet down to walk; being cooped up in my room had taken its toll.

I was afraid as I entered the living room. I did not know what I feared exactly. It all seemed so different—the smell in the air, the brightness of the light—but I didn't know why. Suddenly, my brother opened the door and said, "Look!" I peered out cautiously at a fascinating sight. It was like nothing I had ever seen. The whole outdoors glittered with brightness and was covered with a sheet of glimmering snow.

I was enchanted; it was all like a dream. I found myself listening for the bells from Santa's sleigh. The only snow I had ever seen before was in Christmas cards. Still unsure as to whether or not I was dreaming, I felt the presence of other family members and turned to them saying, "Isn't that the most beautiful sight you have ever seen?"

Then I realized another strangeness—my voice. It came so easily and naturally, yet it had been hard for me to speak my most vague thought. I had not heard my own words for so long. I was smiling. I reached up and touched my face to assure myself that the smile was real, and I wasn't dreaming. I felt the warmth of my blood rushing through my veins; I felt alive again for the first time since my mother's

death. As I stood in the doorway surrounded by my family, I knew I was loved and had a lot to live for. The frame of the door beside me was the gateway to a new life.



Brotherly Love

Ed Moreland
Writing Skills Review

As an adult looking back into my childhood, I now realize that the love that bonded my three brothers and me was definitely much stronger than it appeared. From fights over who was to milk the cow, to arguments over which one of us got to use the new baseball glove, our brotherly love at times looked more like a cockfight. The words "I love you" were three words which could not possibly be said to each other. Brothers were supposed to fight and argue not express their feelings for one another.

On the farm, best friends were hard to come by. Since my school buddies all lived miles away, we were best friends only while at school. Very close friendships away from home were not easy, so my best friends, even though I would never admit it, were my three brothers: Dan, the farmer and football player; Al, the basketball jock; and Dean, the youngster of the family. If we were not fighting with each other over something trivial, we were cheering for each other on the ballfield. We were best friends and worst enemies all in one.

A year and a half ago, our true feelings came forth when my physician informed me that my kidneys had nearly stopped functioning. Dr. Anderson explained to me that my only options were to spend the rest of my life on a kidney dialysis machine, or have a kidney transplant. The choice was easy. The prospect of spending the rest of my life clinging to a machine was out of the question. As far as I was concerned a transplant was my only choice.

A meeting was arranged between my family and the transplant team to explain the options and procedures of the operation. We were told I had two options: remain on a kidney dialysis machine and await a possible donor kidney, or I could accept a kidney from one of my family members. At the time, my father was gravely ill, and my mother and brother Al were both diabetics; this eliminated them from

being possible donors. The thought of either Dan or Dean undergoing this major operation was more than I could possibly ask of them. I did not have the opportunity to tell either of my brothers how I felt. Without hesitation Dan and Dean both insisted that they be tested to be possible donors.

The tests on my two brothers almost made me forget about my problem. For the next four weeks, and without a complaint from either of them, two of my best friends were poked, jabbed, and x-rayed seemingly without end. Scores of blood tests, examinations, and questions followed. I felt as if I were putting my two brothers through pure hell!

From the beginning, I had a strange feeling that my brother Dan would be the doctor's choice. From that point on, Dan seemed to take on the job of my guardian. Several nights when my depression was getting the best of me, Dan would show up to talk and help me take my mind off my illness until my wife returned home from work. Not a day would pass when he didn't at least call on the phone to see if I was all right. When I agreed to accept Dan's offer, I felt the bond that was always there between us strengthen. I talked to my brother in a manner in which I had never before. We discussed life in ways that brothers just never did. Something was happening!

The day of the operation came just two weeks before Christmas. My apprehension was not of my own well being but that of my brother's. My brother Dan was giving a part of himself so that I could possibly live a normal life and live to see my children grow. The operation on both Dan and me went well, and we were both home to celebrate Christmas. I had received the greatest gift anyone could ever possibly ask for.

Now, fifteen months after the operation, the bond my brother and I share with one another remains one of the clearest reminders of our ordeal. We not only share a part of one another, we share a feeling for life and a love for each other that only brothers can understand.



Knowledge Comes Hard

Anita M. Worthington
Writing Skills Review

The one good thing about my marriage was I never had to do any "cuss jobs." But, not being mechanically inclined was my downfall when we divorced. Now I was on my own with four children, living in a near nowhere place with little or no money and a hundred year old house. I don't mean a hundred year old mansion, more like a hundred year old rundown two storied shack (farmhouse). You probably have gone on a country ride past such a place saying, "God, I would never live in a place like that," or "How could anyone live in that thing?"

The thing had a septic tank that was filled to the brim and backing up the sewer line into the toilet. My ex-husband had the knowledge of what to do locked in his mind, but it was not in mine. I called the septic tank man straight from the yellow pages. Right off the start, he wanted one hundred dollars to clean it out—a hundred dollars I didn't have—and I sure as hell didn't know what to do with the shitty mess. My first cuss job, and what a job it was. With a five gallon bucket and a rope, I went to work cleaning it out and dumped it over my five acres. Bucket by bucket, step by step, hour by hour until my five acres of land were well fertilized.

This was only the beginning of my problems and the start of a whole new vocabulary of profanities.

My next cuss job was over oil, to be precise, motor oil. Did you know there are two kinds? If you don't, ask. Ask where the damn stuff goes, besides in the motor. Otherwise, you will be stranded on the interstate cussing up a storm, yelling and kicking your car because the transmission went out due to lack of oil. Meanwhile your kids are huddled in the far corner of the backseat wondering if their mother is demented. Then to make matters worse the tow truck pulls up wanting forty dollars right then and there. You hand over the money cussing under your breath while you and

the kids file into the only available seat in the tow truck, you being the bottom layer.

After a long tortuous ride we finally make it home. Wanting a hot bath to ease my aching bones, I find the bathroom floor flooded. After the shock wears off a new set of cuss words comes forth just for the plumbing. These words are also directed at my ex-husband. I am silently praying he will walk in the door. It's not a prayer for him to fix the broken pipe. I want him there for the sole purpose of murdering him, blaming him for all my problems.

My mind kicked in the day the washing machine broke. The repairman wanted a hundred and fifty dollars to fix a broken drive shaft. I didn't have the money and I was a little suspicious of him. I knew the machine wouldn't wash the clothes if the shaft was broken—the machine would wash but wouldn't spin. The only thing left to do was to try to fix it myself. The first thing I did was call a service part store and explain what the machine wasn't doing and my situation of little money and no know-how. The man on the phone told me right off it wasn't the drive shaft; most likely it was this rubber wheel that made the machine spin. Very patiently he told me step by step how to remove the front panel, what to look for inside, then to call him back and tell him what I saw. I called back within an hour saying I saw this rubber wheel worn and chewed up. For the next hour I was busy removing the damaged part under his instruction. I went to the parts store and within the next hour I was on my way home with a fifteen dollar part and the know-how of putting it back in. I had a new cuss word for the repairman who tried to give me the shaft and a grateful feeling for the only serviceman to this day who has ever gone out of his way to be of extra service.

Everyone has a breaking point and mine came one cold blistery January night while the kids and I were asleep. We woke to freezing temperatures of below zero inside the house. The furnace had died of old age causing the pipes to freeze and burst along with the hot water tank, this causing the water pump to run, burning up the motor.

All the profanities came pouring from my mouth as I sat in the kitchen that cold bitter morning. Only this time the cussing didn't help take the anger and hurt away—this time my spirit was broken; I couldn't take any more problems life was dealing me. I was on the verge of blaming God and Country, hating every man I've known, feeling totally defeated and alone. Tears pouring down my face as my mind was giving up, the more I tried to bring myself back from that black despair the more I cried. My soul was crying out for help even though I didn't realize it at the time. Childhood memories started flooding my mind. A song came to mind, "As the tears come down the prayers go up." Verses entered my troubled thoughts. "Ask, and it shall be received," "Knock and the door will open," "In all things God has a reason." The more the thoughts entered my mind, the more I cried out to the Lord, asking Him why, why are these things happening to me? The more I asked, the more I felt guilty. My prayer turned to, "Help me Lord, I need your help."

And help me He did, simply by having one thing after the other break and break until I learned how to fix them myself.

As the days passed into weeks and weeks into months I learned to cope through the grace of God and prayer. The cuss words are stored within my mind waiting for the next breakage knowing full well that evil lurks behind some cobwebbed corner or worse under the house where unbeknownst critters lie.

The months have turned to years now. Through trial and error, bills from the plumber, mechanic or just a do it all handyman, from the frustration to despair, I learned how to fix most anything. Most important of all, without my faith in God and prayer I would have learned nothing.



The Game

Brinda Cassidy
Writing Skills Review

Monopoly, Bingo and Hot Potato are just a few of the more popular games we play at our house. They usually get pulled from their shelves about once a week. There is a game I didn't mention that does not need a game board or have game pieces. This game is the first one that all of my children learned to play, and it is their favorite. They play this game 20 to 30 times a day, everyday. The name of this game is, "Let's See How Much Patience Mom Has Today."

The children start playing at random times throughout the day. Their best times are when I am on the phone, getting dinner ready, or when we have company over. Why do they pick these times? My guess would be because they are smart. They know their chances of winning are better during these particular times, due to my lack of patience.

The children's voices get loud, their eyes grow big, and their hands get busy. These are all indications of game time. I take a deep breath, put on my game smile and proceed into the first quarter. The child makes the first move. He looks around to see where I am. He then opens the refrigerator door. Since the refrigerator is off limits to our children, this action warrants a penalty. This is the first game of the day and my patience is in good shape. I say, "Don't open that door again or you will go to your room." He slams the door, shaking all of the contents. Then he puts on a smile, hands never leaving the handle, and sways from side to side. If I were to leave the room now, he would probably let go of the door and follow me. He has forgotten what it is in the refrigerator he was after in the first place. He is standing there solely to test my patience. I have four years of game playing experience; therefore, I can read their plays ahead of time. If I were to play along with him and stay in the kitchen, eventually the door would fly open. He would say, "I didn't do it, I am sorry, I won't do it again." I would pull him kicking and screaming back to his room.

We both would feel bad and we would both be losers in this particular game.

Patience is a very important factor in my parenting. I think the more patience I have with the children the better off we all are. When these games with the kids start up, it is important for me to put on my game smile. With a smile on, it is easier to keep a calmness within myself. I have tried both, a smile and a frown, the smile always wins.

Another example is when we are at a nice restaurant with our friends. Our children are in a perfect setting to start up a game. They have me in the palms of their hands. I will do almost anything they want just to keep them sitting and quiet. But when these wonderful little opponents choose to scream, throw silverware and get out of their chairs, my patience dwindles. My game smile quickly comes on as my mind is wondering what to do. I know I have to react smoothly so not to embarrass myself or my opponent. So with a game smile on, I remove the child from the playing field. A good stern look and a threat of a nap usually works 9 out of 10 times. As we walk back to our seats I think to myself, "I am not taking the kids to another restaurant unless there are golden arches in front."

I have yet to meet a parent who is in control all of the time. I am guilty of losing my patience. I think it requires practice. For myself, I find putting on a game smile helps take the edge off. It also helps the children. They don't seem to go quite so "out of control" as they would if I were to confront them with a solemn look. Something else that has proven to be effective is to sing. My husband and kids look at me strangely, but it has worked many times.

To often my children pay the price for my inability to control my patience. Hopefully with time I will improve. I wonder if I played games with my mother and what was her game strategy? She is so patient with my children. Is this the years of game playing? With all the practice I am getting now, maybe I will have more for my grandchildren, let's hope so.



The Last Night

Aaron Smith
Composition I

As Chris wired together a series of mortars to fire in sequence, I warily scanned the sky. The dark clouds that had threatened the entire day seemed to loom even blacker, but it was only the fact that the sun had set that made it that way.

"Don't worry," Chris said, noticing the clouds as though for the first time. "Nothing's going to spoil my last night as a civilian."

At five a.m. the next morning, Chris was scheduled to report for the beginning of his four-year active duty term with the army. He had hoped to be able to have one last night on the town before he left and got lucky by having it on the Fourth of July. The night was planned to be a terrific explosion of light and sound. With the help of two of his uncles and more than five hundred dollars in fireworks, we would set the night on fire.

Starting at nine o'clock that morning, Chris had designed and implemented a display of dazzling brilliance and precision. He had a flair for turning the unexpected into the truly impressive. Instead of buying a nice-looking, fast car, as most teenage boys did, Chris had paid one hundred dollars for a 1973 Impala that should have been crushed in a junk yard long ago. Dents and rust coated the body like a second skin. The back seat was missing and the roof had holes in it. The transmission leaked a quart of fluid a day and the engine was a mess of oil and grease. Three months later, he drove up to school in a freshly painted vehicle that purred along quietly and smoothly. When he sold it a week before he left, he received six hundred dollars for it.

The same could be said of the sacks and boxes of flashbombs, rockets, mortars, missiles, and firecrackers that had been strewn across his kitchen floor and table that morning. Planning from the morning's weather forecasts, he picked an open field to set off from in order to provide

the best view to people in the city park of Leon, Iowa, while not endangering any of the residential areas. He timed fuses to burn out at specific times, adjusted mortars to shoot at the correct height and angle, adjusted the time of flight of missiles before they would explode, and blew up a dozen balloons with helium. When I asked about the purpose of the balloons, Chris replied, with an immense grin on his round face, "You'll see."

The projected time for the start of the city's fireworks display came five minutes after the rain began to patter the ground. The radio announced that the display had been postponed until the next day.

"Well, God damn it!" Chris screamed. He had hoped to eclipse the city's ordinary celebration by unexpectedly following it. "I don't got another day and I'll be damned if five hundred dollars is going to waste!"

Chris lit the flare he would use to light the fuses. It cast an eerie red glow across the field where we stood. I watched as he ran back and forth lighting each fuse at precisely the right moment.

Rockets and missiles crisscrossed the sky, exploding into showers of sparks. Mortars rose hundreds of feet into the sky to blast apart in falling streamers. Red, white, blue, gold, and green mixed across the night sky. Sonic booms from flashbombs punctuated the constant screaming of whistler rockets and the whoosh of air as various things streaked from the ground skyward.

The grand finale was the purpose of the balloons. Suspended from each was a basket with four missile batteries pointing horizontally. They rose to the same height and shot off their missiles as though connected through one fuse.

A moment of silence followed. From the park a growing ruble started. Screams and yells reached our ears amidst the applause. A design of staggering precision and brilliance, the display bested anything anyone had seen before in Iowa.

After the applause died out, Chris sat down next to a fence post. A smile a mile wide appeared on his face. His flat

top was matted down by the rain that continued down his face. His T-shirt and jeans were drenched, but he didn't notice. He reclined against the fence post, letting the rain pour over him as it increased in intensity.



A Day in the Sun

Gail Nelson
Composition I

The bus comes about two minutes to seven. We wait silently, thinking about the tough, long day ahead. Seven whole hours in the corn fields at the hottest point of the year, late July in Iowa.

Looking around, one sees the look of fatigue and dread on the faces of the crew. Clothed in the coolest, oldest worn clothes possible, we look like poverty-stricken field hands; yet we are not. We are middle-class, average junior high schoolers working our first jobs, learning about the real world; the working world, and all the lessons that come from it, such as, long hours, bad pay, unfeeling bosses underworking young kids, and the difference of what one earns and what one gets paid.

Our crew leader drives up, on time. He is a big, solid, good-natured man named Lou. He is in his mid-twenties, working his way through college. The crew likes Lou. He treats us well and works as hard as us. He bids us "Hello" as we board the bus and then hits us with the bad news, we are working on field twenty-three. A deep and collected groan is heard throughout the bus. Twenty-three is the dreaded field. It takes a crew at least four hours to work it, it is endless. It is a nightmare.

We approach the field; the bus stops. We leave in single file, all feeling dread in our stomachs, showing it on our faces. Lou assigns us our rows, two to a row. We diligently begin. Even at seven o'clock in the morning the sun threatens to burn. It has rained the night before, and the mud sticks to the bottoms and sides of our shoes, making it almost impossible to walk. We work two to a row, one behind the other, each taking a side. The sounds heard are the methodic sound of corn tassels being plucked out snap! snap! snap! and the sound of bodies rustling through the rows. After a few minutes, I am oblivious to the noise; I am so used to the sounds that I do not really hear it. I block it

out. I can feel the sun beating down on my unprotected head. The warmth touches my hair, burning my peeling scalp. The heat and humidity already affect me, giving me cotton mouth, making my breathing uneven, and making my t-shirt stick to my soaked body.

It is as if we are in a box. All around us are corn stalks. It is a world of green. Green with the sun beating down, snap! snap! snap! I see a corn spider. Once terrified of them, I have become immune, unfeeling towards them. I walk on, half noticing. I hear the person behind me. We fall in the same rhythm, step, step, snap! step, step, snap! Our legs start to reveal scratches. The sun still tortures us.

We reach the end of our row, only three and a half hours left until lunch. We start a new row. It is as if we are in an unforgiving jungle with a mission. It is another world. At the moment, it is our world, forcing us to deal with the heat, mud, spiders and the unceasing noise, snap! snap! snap! But we do not think about these things; otherwise, we would not make it.



Ralph

Catherine Murphy
Composition I

Ralph Welsh was a railroad man, farmer, husband, dad, and grandfather. To me he was more than a grandfather. The times I spent with Ralph represented more than fading memories of friendship. They represented my youth.

In his healthy days Ralph stood a strong 6'3", a man with presence. He could always be seen in faded denim overalls, worn plaid shirts, and the seed corn or tractor of choice cap, which covered the thinning white hair and shaded the bronze, weather-thickened skin.

During my early visits to the farm, I shadowed my grandfather. I explored the neverending adventures of haylofts and silos. On occasion I was allowed to ride in the tractor and even steer if I was patient. My visits climaxed on Sundays. In church I sat next to my grandfather, who was dressed in his dark gray suit reserved only for those specific events held under the cathedral ceiling. This privilege was not bestowed on any mortal. A person must be still, silent, saint-like in manner. For one hour I perched myself proudly next to the man I admired most, almost as though I was the chosen one.

When I reached the promising age of sixteen, my thoughts drifted from haylofts and cornfields. Ralph owned a car. Not just any car. An antique sea green Buick, trimmed in silver, each corner of the car turned upward, almost as if it floated. I deliberately strolled past the barn where it rested, yearning to grip the steering wheel, to be in control of this buoyant object. And it happened. Ralph wanted me to "run to the store" one day and not take the truck, bad brakes or something. I absorbed few of his words as I watched the sky blue eyes twinkle in amusement. Victory! Chosen again! I drove to town and back not once stopping, for Ralph never told me what he needed at the store.

Life dealt Ralph a difficult hand when the daggers of cancer began tearing away at the lining of a good man.

Suddenly he appeared smaller, physically and mentally. He became harsh with his words, crushing everyone who crossed him. Not an easy man to handle.

During months of grueling hours at his hospital bedside, we began to understand each other as people. With a faded smile in his yellowing eyes, he asked me if I had changed my hair color again, and my, what pretty colors I wore. My heart ballooned with happiness that he noticed. Even though he expressed his opinions in a wayward fashion, I knew he cared. We spent hours watching his favorite westerns. Too weak to laugh, he just turned his head to jaunt his tired eyes, knowing I understood, and I did. I was still the chosen one.

These flooded my thoughts as I sat in the front pew at my grandfather's funeral. The casket covered with cloth, closed forever, held more than just my grandfather and friend. It contained my childhood. I gazed expressionless as the tears flowed from my swollen, scarlet eyes. Did anyone understand what I lost that day? "It was a blessing." "He looks so good." "They did a wonderful job." I wanted my voice carried to the top of the church: "He's dead! Doesn't anyone understand?" But I didn't, and they wouldn't. No one understood my youth was silently sealed in a box lying next to my grandfather.

I walked out of the church for the last time, knowing I'd never return. My foundation of youth had been overturned, not ever to settle in the same manner.

Who would choose me now?



Untitled

*Jan Ferguson
Composition 1*

Every town has its tales of terror. Ours related to the farm just south of Eagle Grove, where the once-beautiful Victorian home still stands. As you look at the house, you can picture it as it would have appeared with its lavish oak furniture and velvet drapes.

About a hundred yards behind the house is what remains of the family cemetery. It is surrounded by a spiked wrought iron fence, half buried with overgrown withered, dead vines and weeds. The walk-through gate hangs at an angle from a broken hinge. Inside, there are twelve headstones in four rows of three each, falling over and crumbling. All show the same name: "Black." All died in December, 1920.

Centered in front of these rows is a large statue, mounted on a stone platform. This statue makes the thirteenth grave marker, the one for Rev. Black. It is made in his image, a cruel, vicious-looking man, full of hatred, with eyes of the devil himself. On the platform beneath the statue, you can still read the engraving:

Rev. Horace L. Black

Born March 1878 - Died December 1920

"Beware to all those who have crossed me, and
their heirs, for I will see them in HELL."

There are various stories telling why the headstones all carry the same last name, year of death, and explaining the inscription on Rev. Black's marker. There are also tales of the spirits which have been seen roaming through the old home.

The most popular of these tales is the one describing Rev. Black coming home unexpectedly from a long trip to find his wife in bed with his brother, Clarence. In his rage, he shot his wife and her lover. Then, continuing this heinous

crime, he went from room to room killing his five children, who he now considered to be merely evil extensions of his wife.

The killing might have stopped here had his sister-in-law and her children not appeared at the foot of the stairs after being awakened by the agonizing screams from above their rooms. Now, he was compelled to continue his murderous rampage. He was now left alone to view the blood-soaked bodies of those he once loved so dearly. Though still in an evil mental state, this vision brought forth a spark of his religious beliefs, which demanded him to properly bury his family.

However, Rev. Black felt his brother's punishment was not complete. In order to satisfy his thirst for revenge, he buried Clarence outside the family cemetery in a shallow grave, believing that being exiled from his family in the life hereafter would cause Clarence everlasting torment.

Now, left alone in his thoughts, he realized his wife could not be trusted, even in death. The only way to assure her fidelity was to once again take his place at the head of the family where he would rest below the monument previously purchased.

Believing that he had always been the brunt of everyone's abuse, he carved a warning on his headstone. Preparations for his departure now complete, he knelt before his headstone as if in prayer, raised the gun to his temple, and pulled the trigger.

As the story goes, if the sky is clear and the moon full, you can still see through the windows Rev. Black going from room to room, killing his wife, her lover, and all family members. If you listen carefully, you can hear the screams of terror.

Since the age of 12, I have heard these stories from several teenagers who swore they went to the farm and could hear the screams and see Rev. Black's silhouette in the windows as he killed his family.

When I was seventeen, five friends and I decided to see for ourselves if the stories were true. We went out at 4:30 p.m. Brave as we were, we decided to check out the house

and cemetery when it was still light, just to get a feel for the place. This would help us figure out what some of the shadows were after dark. Not to mention, if we needed to run, we'd know where everything was!

We went out and looked everything over carefully—first, the cemetery—next, the house, inside and out. We then drove a safe distance to where we could get a clear view of the house and upstairs windows. In October, nightfall came early, so we didn't have long to wait for darkness.

It was almost 9:00 p.m. when Cindy saw a shadow in the master bedroom window. We all stared at the window. Then, there it was! Something passed by the window! We all screamed and didn't know whether to stay or run! We sat frozen, as we saw yet another shadow by the window! We heard what we were sure was a scream. John flipped on the headlights and started the car so we could leave. He was just turning the car toward the road when I saw something move in the window again. I screamed for him to stop and flash the brights; we waited for it to move again. It did. It was a curtain! The shredded remains of the velvet drapes were blowing in the wind through the broken windows.

We all felt stupid for being scared of a curtain, but, as we sat laughing, we heard another scream. Much louder this time. We all sat quietly, actually glued to our seats. The scream was heard over, and over again. We kept looking around to see where it was coming from. There they were . . . Screech Owls! . . . sitting in an old dead tree about fifty yards from the car. Two owls, fighting over custody of the tree.

We all agreed to get out of there . . . now! We wanted to leave while we could still believe it was the curtains and owls. We had braved it and were satisfied. So, we went back to town, laughing and joking about what had occurred and all the tales we had heard, satisfied that they were all just silly stories.

Still, the cemetery bothered me. All the same names, same date of death, and the lonely grave outside the fence. This kept me awake all night, so I decided to see what the back issues of the newspaper would reveal.

Early the next morning, I went to the newspaper office and looked up the papers for December, 1920. After about an hour of reading, there it was . . . front page news!

18 DIE IN TRAIN CRASH

The story told of how Rev. Black, his family, and his brother's wife and children were going to Denver to spend Christmas with his brother Clarence, who was stationed there while in the service. A few hours after they left town, the train they were riding in was struck by a cattle train. The Black family, engineer, coal stoker, and three from the other train were killed.

The following week's issue of the paper showed Clarence Black's picture on the front page. The story told how Clarence came home to bury his dead. The day after the funeral, a neighbor found him hanging from a rope in the barn. It can only be surmised that Clarence didn't want to go on living without his family.

There are no answers to be found for the inscription on the platform of Rev. Black's statue, or why his statue looks so full of hate. Only speculation and stories.



Class Reunion

Denise Farr
Composition I

I can already picture my 10-year class reunion. Sherry, Julie, Diane, and all the other girls will be taking about all the fun they had during those last three years of high school. Once in awhile, I'll recognize a story about "shagging the drag" in that 5-speed Julie didn't even know how to drive. It never failed, every time a carload of cute guys drove by, she'd grind the gears or, worse yet, kill the engine. Or, what about the night Diane ran over Julie's foot? Unfortunately, the stories I'll recognize will be few and far between.

"Remember that night we all stayed at Val's. . . ."

I don't think I ever knew where Val lived.

". . . or what about when Patty and Monny called Neal and. . . ."

When was that?

"Hey! I'll never forget the night Wendy and Dave got in a fight and she. . . ."

Maybe one of my old teachers is around here somewhere. . . .

"Oh Denise, I don't think you were there, were you? I wonder—oh, you were probably with Siam that night."

After hearing that phrase for the 50th time, I'll wish I could tape someone's mouth shut. But, it wouldn't be fair for me to direct my hostility toward anyone but myself.

Siam and I started going steady in the fall of my sophomore year. He was a junior, an "older man!" I had just broken up with Jerry Porter and was ready to go out and forget about my problems. The Friday coming up was my birthday and coincidentally, Siam's was the day after mine. Since I wasn't going to get my license until the following Monday, Siam offered to drive me and my friends around and celebrate with us. We partied in my name until the stroke of midnight, which marked the end of my birthday and the beginning of Siam's.

That night marked another important beginning. From then on, I spent most of my time with my new boyfriend. He walked me to all my classes and we were together every weekend. Sometimes, if he had to work on Friday night, I'd go out with my friends until he got off. I was a little uncomfortable ditching the girls halfway through the night, so I eventually just stayed home and waited for him.

During this time, my three best friends from South Junior High were going out with and getting to know the "North girls" who were now our classmates. On Mondays, I'd sit in study hall and listen as they hashed over everything that went on that weekend. After awhile, I didn't really even listen since I barely knew the people they were talking about.

Sherry would say, "Denise is probably bored listening to us. Must be nice to have a boyfriend to take you out every night!"

All the other girls would voice their agreement and say what a great couple Siam and I made and how lucky I was. Of course, they had boyfriends too, but their relationships didn't seem to last as mine and Siam's had. Yes, I was pretty lucky.

I devoted the last three years of high school to my relationship with Siam and it wasn't always smooth sailing. Actually it was a three-year cycle of happiness, pain, anger, jealousy, and nearly breaking up before we came full circle to happiness again. I feel very lucky that my friends still cared enough to be there for me during the bad times, but I also feel guilty that I wasn't around for them, only for Siam. Siam—the "wonderful" guy who turned my life upside-down every other month or so.

As I walk through the malls today and see the young guys and girls all wrapped up in each other, I feel sorry for them. I look at them and try to learn what is making them tick. What was it that drove me, and is now driving them, into a serious romantic relationship at such a young age?

A friend of mine believes that it's just human nature. There have always been and there always will be those couples who get together in high school and are married

right after graduation. I don't disagree with her. However, when Greg and Marcia Brady were young teens, you didn't see them walking through the mall with their arms wrapped around their sweeties, sneaking down empty corridors to steal a quick kiss or two. Times have changed and couples are getting together at younger ages. As I was leaving Valley West Mall one Saturday night, I saw two kids who couldn't have been more than 13 or 14 years old making out over by the bicycle rack. This is human nature?

I sometimes wonder if all the talk about AIDS and safe sex is doing more harm than good.

Are we making sex such a major issue in the news that we're arousing the curiosity of the younger kids? I agree that educating them is the best way to prevent growth of the problem, but we might be creating a "forbidden fruit." Even when you are aware of the dangers, it is often hard to resist temptation.

Another issue is the number of single parent families. For example, a young, fatherless boy may become the man of the house long before he's ready. When he gets home from school, he's responsible for the house, his little sister, and maybe even starting supper because his mom won't be home until five. It's not his fault, nor is it his mother's fault. That's just the turn society is taking. Many young kids are growing up too fast in other aspects of their lives—it would be easy for them to become dependent upon a romantic relationship.

Families with two working parents may be suffering also. There aren't always enough hours in the day for quality family time when the parents don't get home until five or six o'clock. Maybe young people are having to turn to boyfriends and girlfriends to get the affection their parents don't have time to give them.

That's not to say that all of these people are neglecting their kids. Many single and working parents are dealing with their children of the 90's quite well. However, this fast-paced society of our does seem to be taking its toll on many families.

The most obvious issue may just be the typical parent/teenager relationship. Parents sometimes tend to push too hard and, instinctively, the kids are going to push back. My mom tried to tell me that I was too young; that I was missing out on good times with my friends; that I had the rest of my life to devote to a man. I was going to show her that I could make my own decisions and run my own life. What did she know?

She knew that I would someday look back at my high school years and wish that I had done things differently. I'm sure I'm not the first person to reach this conclusion, and I'm sorry that I won't be the last.



Commodities

*Kelly Green
Composition I*

I pull my car into the parking lot of the warehouse, a desolate wasteland of junk automobiles and garbage. I try to shield myself from the rain and bitter wind, as I shuffle my feet through the trash and make my way to the entrance door. Upon entering I must pause to let my eyes adjust to the artificial light, which as a tendency to make people and things appear gray and shadowy. The large open area contains very few souls today. The ones that were brave enough to bare the elements are here for one thing, food. The hunger that comes with poverty is their common bond.

"Take a number," someone whispers in my direction, as if it were a well-kept secret. I wouldn't have even noticed the peg, sticking out of the wall with the tattered numbers, for it lay surrounded by other weathered bulletins, all seeming of little importance. I sit down on a cold metal folding chair to wait my turn. I feel a draft and wonder where it is coming from. Looking up I notice the ceiling is very high; all the wiring and air ducts are exposed. My eyes travel down the unfinished walls to the concrete floor and I note the piles of boxes in the distance. Their contents are what we are here for.

By this time I am beginning to feel somewhat like a junkie waiting to get a fix. My nerves make me jittery and expectant. I also feel ashamed and embarrassed as I avert eye contact with others.

There is an old black man next to me. He rises unsteadily on his cane when his number is called. I feel his despair, as the woman at the counter asks him a few personal questions, his age, address if any and income. With eyes downcast he answers her obediently.

Then to break the hush, a baby cries. I turn to see a woman struggling to hold a baby in one arm and a little girl with the other. The young mother looks worn and tired. The remnants of makeup, slept in and several days old,

discolor her face. All of the clothes they wear are old and dingy. The two little girls are frail and underdressed for the weather outside. They have big brown eyes that are almost hidden behind long and matted uncombed hair. I find it hard not to stare, in my disgust, at their dirty faces. Mucus is pouring from their red noses over chapped lips. I shudder in contempt; even the layers of filth cannot conceal the sores on their pale skin: scabies.

Soon we all form a convoy with rusty carts. A piece of paper guides us to our allotted stacks of food. First stop is the bread table, piled with assorted day-old baked goods. I can't help but think the flavor might be somewhat tainted by the mold and staleness, but then again beggars can't be choosers. Next are the pallets stacked with boxes of white labeled cans, its contents identified by a single word: Pears, Beans, Meat, Potatoes. And on the back, graced by the phrase, "Donated By The U.S. Department of Agriculture For Food Help Programs." For some odd reason I feel a sort of ironic humor at this attempted act of generosity.

At the exit, my goods are checked. I am asked to put my mark at the bottom of the used allotment paper. I look back into the warehouse and know these walls contain more than food. It houses the lost dignities and silent desperate cries of those overlooked by society, people broken down to mere survival.

Outside an angry lazy-looking man with greasy hair is chastising the young depressed mother as she clutches her babies to her bosom. "Is that all you got!" he scowls. And in my helplessness, I start to cry. I know who will eat that food tonight.



THE AFTERSCHOOL RITUAL

An Outsider's Observations

Christian Mueller
Composition I

At 2:50 on a crisp, autumn Wednesday afternoon, a large Italian woman sits in her maroon Aries K, reading the paper. I sit two parking spaces to her left, outside Hubbell Elementary School, minding my own business. Directly in front of me, beyond the tall, silver, chain-link fence lies an empty playground. An octagonal sand pit provides the foundation for this fortress of metal slides, wooden bridges, and faded, multi-colored climbing bars and poles. We didn't have a chain-link fence surrounding my grade-school playground; we didn't need to. Its presence begs the question of whether it's there to keep the children from wandering out into the world, or to keep the world from wandering in on the children. As I ponder this, a lone, black boy struts by wearing jeans, and high-tops, clutching a mini-sized basketball. He sets his overstuffed backpack down and begins bouncing the ball with his gloved hands, dribbling all around the cracked cement court.

Three spaces to my right, an older man pulls up in his Chevy pick-up truck with matching topper. His hair is gray and his face is as weathered as his faded blue baseball cap. He and his truck disappear into the space beside the Italian woman. She is still reading.

Enter three young boys: One is coasting a green bike and wearing a backpack as his red haired friend walks along side. As these two continue behind the building, the third, a black boy, stops to join his friend, the original boy with the ball, and begins to dribble. Just then, a red VW arrives directly to my right, and out walks a well dressed woman of perhaps forty, wearing jeans and a green sweater. As she steps onto the sidewalk that parallels the chain-link fence and separates it from the grills of our cars, her little boy hops out of the passenger side and joins her. On their way

inside, the VW lady waves to the Italian woman who smiles and waves back.

I am now surrounded by cars, and directly to my right is a "working class" looking woman with barrettes in her hair. They are the metal, triangular kind that snap into place when bent. VW Lady comes back out, now with two children. A little girl about the boy's size, possibly his sister, has joined them wearing a hot pink coat. Mom lets the two kids in the car first, then lets herself in, and they pull away.

To my left sits a brunette woman whose black hair is being overtaken by gray streaks. She looks at me, and as we exchange friendly smiles, I notice the bags under her eyes. Everybody looks so anxious around here. Every parent seems almost nervous with anticipation for their child to come into sight. They seem almost scared that, today, *their* child won't come into sight; today, something happened to *their* child.

Upon focusing on reality once again, I notice that VW Lady's spot has been filled by a woman in a Caravan. She is wearing a big tan coat, and appears to be reaching for something behind the seat. Just then, our original black boy's ball rolls up against the fence. He chases after it and picks it up. Here I notice the graying lady: she squints and scrutinizes his actions. Yet, after he leaves, she still seems to be studying something, or perhaps she's not focusing on anything but her thoughts.

Just as I begin to explore what those thoughts might be, my concentration is broken by a couple walking past. His jeans are dark blue and much too big for him. On top, he wears a Mexican style hooded pullover underneath a flimsy, blue nylon windbreaker with the letters "U S A" emblazoned in gold across the back, and an American flag patch on the shoulder. He has messy black hair, long sideburns, and tinted glasses. She is very short, and wears a badly frayed jean jacket. Her lack of height, however, is compensated by her long, long dark hair. They are holding hands.

The Caravan lady gets out, bundles up her child, then bundles herself up. As they walk inside I think, "Like

mother, like daughter!" Suddenly, out of nowhere, two boys dart down the sidewalk, one right after the other. I don't get the feeling that they know each other. I guess darting down the sidewalk is just the thing to do when you're a kid and it's after school, and both of these guys know it.

Working Class walks out to meet her boy who is loaded down with papers and a yellow lunch box. As she puts her arm around him they are both smiling and I notice he has school pictures. I remember school pictures. They were rotten every year, they never looked like me, and my parents *loved* them. My folks always thought they were beautiful and made sure every relative had their own portrait of me at my best: my hair messed up, my collar stuck out, and my face graced with some surprised look or awkward expression. Anyway, Working Class is in the car with her son and I can see them talking, but then he starts to get back out. He pauses to listen to one final word of instruction from Mom, and I see him reply, "Yes!"

Three little girls skip by and the dominant color is pink. Kids are such *kids* sometimes! Life was so carefree when I was their age; I wonder if their lives are as simple as they appear to be. Maybe children just do a better job of hiding stress. Maybe we all need to skip a little more than we do. All the kids here look like little adults. They all have these wise, little, grown up faces attached to children's bodies. I hope today's world is still allowing kids time to be kids. For some reason I have a feeling that it is not.

Graying Lady gets out of her car and walks down to meet her approaching boy. When she joins him, she relieves him of his heavy bag and they head for the car. Once there, she lets her son in *her* side and he crawls across the seat. Inside, I see they are talking, looking at his artwork, and smiling.

The playground is filling up rather quickly. It acts like a magnet, drawing children in to it as they come out the doors. In my mirror, I can see behind me a station wagon leaving full of three girls and two boys. They're heading home! A blond boy with a very old looking face walks past. He's dressed in jeans, a long coat, and duck boots. His clothes and face make him look like he should be in college.

I just can't get over how grown up all of these kids look. A large black man walks past and waves over the top of my car to someone behind me. His boy and girl follow close behind. Just then, a brown Accord pulls up where Graying Lady was parked. This woman wastes no time in getting out of her car to meet her crew.

Here comes the boy from Working Class' car; he now has his hat, and a big smile on his face! Mission accomplished! My attention is then attracted to a certain "nerdy" looking kid passing by wearing a leather coat, an over-sized stocking cap, and a big pair of glasses. He looks like the class brain though I'm not exactly sure what made me notice him. All of the sudden a big kid with close cut blond hair bursts on to the scene. He forcefully approaches a smaller boy who is surrounded by two girls. They are the kind of girls that one can just tell will be some of the "good looking girls," in future years. Anyway, the bully is now pushing the little boy and quickly drawing back for punches that never seem to materialize. I can just imagine him threatening, "I'll do it! I'll hit you! I'm serious!" Well, the girls seem to have come to the rescue, the bully mopes off, and I can see the little boy staring at the ground as the girls console him. I turn to see where our bully went, and just as I do he is joined by none other than the nerdy kid that caught my eye several minutes before! This really makes me wonder if there isn't some homework being done in exchange for friendship or maybe some protection.

In a white Caravan I notice a dark haired two-year-old girl contemplating the world. Her chin is cradled in the palms of her hands as her elbows rest in the window's frame. I think she may be studying me in greater detail than I'm studying her. She's so cute. The space to my left is suddenly occupied once again, and the future-good-looking-girls and little boy squeeze into a car that is already carrying two small children in the back seat. After a brief discussion of who is to sit in front, Mom's taxi is on its way home.

The crowd is thinning out. The playground is once again empty, and the Caravan pulls away. A lone, older boy in

white jeans and a camouflage coat saunters past the playground, not giving it a second thought. Between the sun setting low in the November sky and the breeze whistling about my car, somehow I sense it is time for me to leave. I have just witnessed a ritual. To everyone I saw here today, this was just a sliver of time in a cyclical routine that reiterates itself every twenty-four hours. To them, today was as similar to yesterday as it will be tomorrow. To me it was a one time experience more valuable than any Child Development text, or any psychological journal. I enjoyed myself today; I hope you enjoyed my account of it.



A Day of Accomplishment

Kimberly Manthei
Composition I

All was quiet in the large gymnasium. Waiting for the music to start, my squad was crouched in position on the floor anxious to perform. The judges were waiting patiently, pencil and score sheet in hand. The bleachers were packed with fans holding pink slips of paper with the agenda for the competition. The first beat of music was key to our performance. We were sure to hear it too; it was so quiet, you could hear a pin drop.

Thoughts of the many long hard hours of practice ran through my head. Would we do as good as I had hoped? Would all of our hard work pay off? I was tense, but more excited than nervous. This was state competition, and I was going to give it my full 100%.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see some members of the squad. One had her eyes shut, like she was praying. Another was holding the position so tightly, she was shaking. Others had beads of perspiration on their foreheads, because the gym was so hot.

The music started and we moved to the beat. It was very loud and I could feel a tremendous vibration through the floor. This gave me a feeling of energy and power as our squad made a statement. Every move was sharp and precise. Each girl was giving it her all. No one was off count; we moved as "one."

The people in the bleachers had smiles breaking across their faces. They were excited and got involved in the dance routine. Some clapped their hands while others stomped their feet to the beat. I could see my family and other fans and members of my community supporting us. Many of the parents of the drillteam members wore their school colors and brought pom poms, flags, and posters representing their school.

Some of the girls from other squads were sitting in their crowd, watching us and waiting for their turn to "show

their stuff." Their uniforms sparkled in the light and their faces showed in awe. I could see some looked nervous awaiting their chance to compete.

Bright flashes of light reflected off the gym floor from cameras taking pictures. A couple of men were standing on the floor videotaping us, along with a couple of parents.

As we moved into different formations on the floor, I looked up to the very top bleacher. There were about ten judges madly writing comments down on the score sheets and talking into a small tape recorder. Some were smiling and others looked serious, nodding their heads.

The routine was winding down and my muscles ached from previous practice. I knew others felt the same, but it didn't matter we kept going strong. The three minute routine had to be perfect. This was the state competition. We worked hard many weeks preparing for this grand finale.

Our facial expressions were at our best, smiles huge. We looked like we were having fun, and we were! We had counted on each other to come through and do our best for the squad as well as ourselves. The routine was over as we struck our final pose to a sharp beat. Then, something happened that we didn't expect.

The crowd jumped up like a wave across the gymnasium. People were screaming and clapping for us. Everyone I could see was smiling and wide-eyed. As we got up from our final pose, I could see tears of pride, joy, and accomplishment streaming down my squad members' cheeks. I could see the happiness in their eyes as they looked across the crowd. We had built a momentum in the gym making the crowd excited. It was a wonderful feeling we all shared as a team. My eyes overflowed with tears as we left the floor.

We reached the door to the exit and could still hear the crowd screaming. We embraced each other with tight hugs and more tears. Working hard as a team, we accomplished our goal, to be the best we could be.

Not only did we fulfill our expectations and receive a standing ovation, but we came home with a first place trophy, each member full of pride.



Hard Rains Again?

Ron Jones
Composition I

She introduces herself to us in the Survey of Addition class. "I'm Sue. I'm twenty four, a chemical dependence counselor in the Iowa Air National Guard. We're on standby alert status, packed and ready. So if you see an empty seat here in the weeks ahead, you'll know where I've gone," she says and smiles.

We are made uneasy by her short speech. The spectre of an empty desk makes the possibility of war in the Persian Gulf seem unexpectedly personal.

Who could have foretold that on this warm clear day in the fall of 1990, I would be sitting in a college classroom listening to a fellow student talk of making plans to go to war? Until today, the realities of war and empty desks have existed for me only in the shadowland of memories that reach some twenty years into the past.

I remember the angst of a crisp fall evening in 1970. My friends and I sit conversing and drinking beer in a dormitory room on the campus of the University of South Dakota. This is McGovern turf, but the talk is not of politics. Tonight the town of Vermilion seems not so distant from that blood-red Asian landscape we see daily on t.v. The Selective Service Lottery, not politics, will decide our fates this evening. Soon this primetime show will determine whose desks will be empty next semester.

We wait and listen to Crosby, Stills, and Nash and Bob Dylan records. Talk revolves around the lottery. "Hosted by Mr. Death, and brought to you by the-machine-that-lives-on-brute-force-and-eats-children-for-breakfast" says a friend and we laugh. A discussion about the difference between mace and tear gas is begun and quickly cropped in favor of speculation about braless hippie chicks. This subject holds our interest for the time it takes to drink another beer. Someone asks the ancient Zen question, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Someone else

asks, "What is the smell of one monk burning?" We have all seen the recent television pictures of Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire as a protest against the war. We drink, we smoke, and we laugh the humorless laughter of fear. The stereo plays "It's a hard rains a gonna fall" and it is for us that Dylan sings while we wait to find out whose numbers will come up.

None of us mention Mac, whose number has already come up and who has just returned home in a box. We do not tell each other what we all know, that a land-mine jumped out of the ground in front of him and made hash of his intestines.

The reverie recedes. Only images remain—the image of how it was for Dean who came home strung-out on heroin, an image of what it was like for Mike, whose brains were permanently scrambled from too much acid and too much incountry. There had been no reason to think of these things or to relive that night in 1970 until the young reservist, with her remark about "an empty seat," brought it all home again.

A friend often jokes, "If you remember those times, you probably weren't there." I had forgotten a war that had caused some of us to grow old too soon and some of us to die. I had forgotten that thirty years ago we had only a handful of military advisors in Vietnam. None of us at that time were thinking in terms of a protracted conflict. Yet it would be fourteen years later that the war would end, leaving 50,000 Americans dead and the ideals of a generation turned upside down. I remember watching as time slipped away, and the fighting escalated into a war from which we were unable to extricate ourselves. We began to seriously question our involvement in Vietnam only after the empty desks had begun to appear. By that time, it was too late.

Twenty years ago, my friends and I were in the same age group as are the majority of students on this campus today. I wonder if any of these students will have to fight and die in a war in the Middle-East. If we find ourselves in a combat situation, and no one can deny that we are geared up for

one, it will be this generation of students who will sustain the same kinds of suffering and losses which mine has.

Perhaps, as Kurt Vonnegut said recently on the *Today* show, "Good American citizens aren't supposed to notice some things." But if the hard rain starts to fall and it all goes bad again, it is going to be impossible not to notice the empty desks.



Midnight Rendez-vous

Karen Ortberg
Composition 1

As a 16 year old I was basically pretty straight, doing very little to cross my strict mother and stern stepfather. The excitement of a midnight rendez-vous with my boyfriend, however, was more than I could resist.

It was a hot summer night and I had planned to sleep on the daybed in the back porch, which I did occasionally since it was cooler than my bedroom. I lay there awake, listening to the rustle of the leaves, feeling the soft breeze, anxiously awaiting my midnight caller. Would he come? Would he manage to get out of his house without being caught? I was startled from my thoughts by a light tap on the door. He'd made it!

Now it was my turn to sneak out unnoticed. All was quiet and dark in the house, and I prayed no one would hear the screen door creak as I slipped out. My heart was pounding so hard I thought it would burst within my chest. I opened the door, barely wide enough to squeeze through, and let it softly latch behind me. I was out, with no sign of disturbing anyone within the house.

Hand in hand, we stealthily made our way through the dark, moonless night to the nearby cemetery, where we were certain we wouldn't be disturbed. We lay down in the soft, plush grass with a feeling of satisfaction. As we embraced and kissed passionately under the stars, I began to realize that he had higher expectations than I about what would happen that night. I just wanted the thrill of sneaking out without being caught.

After an hour of frolicking in the grass around the cemetery, he had given in to defeat, and I was feeling apprehensive about sneaking back in. We cautiously returned to my house, and again my heart started to race. Would my parents have awakened and discovered my disappearance? There was only quiet and darkness as we approached the door. We whispered our good-byes, and

ever so quietly I entered the back porch, fearful I might encounter angry, waiting parents. But all was just as I left it. I slipped in between the cool sheets, my heart still racing, feeling exhilarated. I did it and I got away with it, but I never attempted it again.



"Dead" But Living On

*Karen Jenkinson
Composition I*

A vigil is in process. There has been a "death," but family and other loved ones must wait. No arrangements have been made. Monies have not yet crossed hands between family members and funeral director. Flowers have not been ordered. A priest, rabbi, or minister has not been called. Countless tears have been shed. Much grieving has been done. But still, there can be no closure because the body continues. For all intents and purposes the mind has ceased to exist. It is "dead."

Alzheimers, perhaps the most dreaded disease known to man, strikes primarily the aged, leaving its victims with no semblance of what they once were. Religious affiliation, political inclination, or sex of its recipient matter not at all. Life's accomplishments or lack of them are not determining factors either in who gets the disease or who does not.

Testing and diagnosis of Alzheimers can and is done, but in final analysis no absolute determination can be made until an autopsy has been performed and the victim's brain cells examined. Scientist have yet to determine a cure and even the cause of the disease is illusive. Speculation on genetic and environmental toxins continue to be probed in hopes a cause and ultimately a cure will be found. Until then though, victims and their families endure as best they can.

The scenario of an Alzheimers sufferer is indeed a sad one. In the initial stage, its victims may at times be rational and competent, able to perform normal everyday functions, and moments later be irrational in their thinking and even abusive for no apparent reason. Then, a swing back to reality might be just as abrupt. Sufferers may have the disease and not be fully aware of it, knowing that things don't seem quite "right," but denying to themselves and others that any serious condition exist. Later, times of reality and lucidness decrease and the victim seems to be in a "world of their own making" much of the time. Sad

though it may sound, for the family, this transition may actually be somewhat welcomed, a reprieve of sorts. The ever constant struggle to be in the "here and now" gone, the victim appears happier. Finally in the latter stages of the disease its victims often become incontinent and unable to perform such basic functions as dressing or providing themselves with nourishment. Many become bedridden. Heartrending it is for family members who are no longer recognized.

For the family, with the onset of the disease, comes decisions. One physician, when speaking of the family obligation in such cases, said simply that the family's responsibility is to see to it that the "loved one" is "kept free from harm." How to go about this is an agonizing question for all involved. Should "Mom" move in with a daughter or son? Or, the most distressing solution, should "Mom" be placed in a nursing facility? No one answer is right for all. Too many factors come into play. Each family must search for their own solution. Competent caregivers are difficult to come by and with round the clock care needed the expense factor may not be a viable option for many. Nursing homes are an expensive alternative and in some cases will not accept Alzheimer patients particularly if they are combative or abusive. Then too, the guilt factor of "putting 'Mom' away" may be too much for some to handle. For many the only option available is to take "Mom" into their homes.

Some say caring for an elderly Alzheimers parent is rather like caring for an infant. There are parallels to be sure, but the comparison is made devoid of the extreme harshness of reality. With an infant there is a progression. Someday an infant will eat without aid, walk with no assistance, talk intelligibly, and be potty trained. With the Alzheimer victim the progression of life has been taken away. There is only degeneration until the end. It may be a year, ten years, more or less. Even trained physicians can not with any certainty predict when an Alzheimer sufferer can finally be put to rest. So grief will continue. Any subsiding of it must wait until then.



Just A Way To Make A Living

Nancy Arthur
Composition I

If I recall correctly, I was only eight or nine years old when I first learned of a beauty salon. My friend, Susan, was dropped off at my house to play for an hour while her mother visited the beauty salon. Susan explained, at my request, that the visit included a haircut, an application of some haircolor, and a new hairstyle. "You know, all that boring stuff," she said. Boring stuff? I was in awe! At this point I made two conclusions. First, I concluded that Susan's family must be really rich and glamorous, and secondly, I decided that someday, somehow, I would visit that salon.

I never lost my fascination for the beauty business and by the time I was twelve I had earned enough money from babysitting jobs to get my first professional haircut. Although my parents paid for all our basic necessities, my mother felt that her "kitchen cuts" were quite adequate for our family and this long awaited adventure would have to be at my expense.

I arrived for my haircut appointment one hour early, although I wished it had been two. Judy, the local salon owner, was aware of my excitement since it was her children for whom I had been babysitting. She allowed me to watch her employee and herself perform various techniques on their clients and even encouraged me to ask questions of which there were many. It was Judy who eight years later offered me my first job upon completion of beauty school. I worked for her for ten years before opening my own business in 1982. So I have been a professional hairstylist for eighteen years and still I'm fascinated by much of what we accomplish in the salon.

Now I'd like to give you a tour through a typical visit to a hairstyling salon, as it is now called. What the client may see as simply a "haircut appointment," a stylist views as a three stage process starting as you enter the salon and

ending when you depart—looking great! Let's begin with stage one, the consultation stage. By the time most stylists escort you to their work-stations they have already noticed how you are dressed, your current hairstyle, and in greeting you get a glimpse of your personality. This information helps the stylist decide on the direction taken to guide your new look, if that's what you're after. For example, a stylist would never suggest an outrageously wild or punk hairstyle for someone who seems quite shy or is very conservatively dressed. Can you imagine a businessman in a three-piece-suit sporting a lightning bolt shaved on one side of his head?

Next the stylist asks the client questions about his or her lifestyle, likes and dislikes in respect to hair, as well as strengths and weaknesses in styling technique and the amount of time allowed to spend on it each day. Perhaps a busy mother of three will want a style that can be completed in just a few minutes. For her we might suggest a soft perm and layered cut so that she simply has to wash it, comb it through and let it air dry as she performs her other numerous tasks every morning. On the other hand, time may be no object to a teenager who wants to gel it, scrunch it, mousse it, spike it, even mold it to achieve a look that's hot.

We are now ready to enter stage two, the analysis stage. This is where the stylists take all the information they've collected about you and incorporate this together with their knowledge and experience to form a hairstyle that will flatter as well as suit you. A stylist is taught to study the shape of the face and use symmetrics of hairstyling to flatter good features and diminish the less attractive ones. For example, most people know that they don't look good with their hair parted down the middle but they don't know why. Your stylist can demonstrate how different the two sides of your face are and that a center part just accentuates that fact. By parting your hair on the smaller side of your face, you have opened up that side while diminishing the fuller one. Your stylist should also be able to suggest a

length that would be right for you and be able to explain where you need fullness or less height and why.

Once a look has been agreed upon you enter stage three, the technical stage. At this point the stylist actually cuts and styles the hair. This is also the easiest stage for us as we simply go through the mechanics of the cut. Now the conversation may get more social and affords the client and stylist time to get to know one another. Often times a special relationship forms between them. Maybe the closeness comes from the fact that there's no other profession, other than that of doctor, that allows physical contact with the client. There's rarely a wedding where the family hairstylist doesn't play a major role, and we've had numerous calls from the labor room announcing the birth of a future client! Recently while styling eight year old Sarah's hair I noticed the look of excitement on her face and thought to myself that must be what I looked like to Judy about thirty years ago. Sarah had many questions about my chosen profession and I enjoyed giving her my undivided attention. Why knows, maybe I'll be her first employer someday!

Sometimes we fail to realize how much influence we have on our customers. A good friend of mine, a psychologist who mainly works as a marriage counselor, marvels at this. He told me that more than a few times he's questioned a patient as to why they refused to follow his instructions and the patient replied, "Because my hairstylist advised me not to." Now there's a case where perhaps the stylist should have been doing more listening and less talking.

I hope that you are now more prepared to make your next haircut appointment. When the receptionist says, "Will that be for just a cut today?" you'll say, "No, I'll have a consultation, an analysis, *and* a cut, thank you!"



Untitled

Catherine Murphy
Composition I

I sit in a corner, a complete outsider to this world that is so comfortable to the people that pass through. It's early evening and a soft rose dusk has swept the sky. The last traces of light make their final shadows through the open doorway of the stable. The stable runs the length of a football field and the ground is a soft packed dirt scattered with hay. There are four rows of stalls, two of which are back to back. Each one holds a horse: all sizes, all colors.

The smell of wet hay clings to my clothes and is now familiar to me. The damp odor catches in my nostrils and lingers in my throat. I can't help but think of my perfume packed in my purse not three inches from my feet. In the background I hear the echo of feed buckets clanging on the stall walls. The horses stomp their hooves anxiously, moving with short, jerky steps back and forth in their small spaces. Together they orchestrate a rhythm. I feel excitement in the air. It is race night and I sense the animals know this.

One particular horse catches my eye. His broad body stands about six feet tall. His coat is a glistening blue-black. Black as a night that the moon has not come forth and the stars are nowhere in sight. I'm lost in the shiny glaze of his color. I notice a wild look in his large brown eyes. A nervous look. He rears his powerful front legs and throws his head back, showing me his thick yellow teeth.

A man appears to calm the horse. He is a small man dressed in faded black Levis, a blue and gray flannel shirt, and a much worn jean jacket that is soft around the collar. His boots intrigue me. The thick brown leather molds to his pant leg and the toes turn upward. No where in Iowa do you find such boots that suggest years of hard labor that only true horse trainers know.

This man saunters over to my newly found friend and stands at face level with the horse. I cannot hear the words

he is speaking, but his hands are around the horse's bridle and the wild look in the black animal's eyes has calmed. The man rubs the horse's long face with tender hands and is still whispering in his ear when finally the stomping stops. The horse's powerful limbs become still except for the ripple of thick muscles that line his legs.

A young couple walks past me to a horse not far from where I sit. The man bends down and sweeps under the stall gate. He begins to untie the horse and orders the woman to hand him something on the wall. Her blonde head turns back and forth as she searches the area for the item requested. Her sparkling blue eyes look unsure as she gingerly takes a leather strip off a hook and hands it to him. He reaches out from his position and snatches it without looking up. Nothing more was said. Meanwhile, she looked somewhat pleased and they continued in this manner.

In what I know will be my final minutes in this strange world, I look over at the black horse. The gentle man has left and the horse appears sedate. His large head is down and swaying back and forth. Streaks of light reflect off his silky hair like flashes of knife blades. He suddenly raises his head and peers into my eyes. Just as the kind man had calmed my friend with words and gentle touches, my friend has calmed me. Our gazes lock and a quiet serenity passes through me. As I gather my things, I do not notice the smell anymore. The sounds I know I will miss when I leave. I turn to look at my horse once before I go. The man has returned and is leading the horse to the open doorway that leads to the track. I wish the black animal a silent good luck and quietly follow.



AN INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

How To Get The Most Return From Your Deposit

Jenifer Moses
Composition II

I work as a Management Consultant for Principal Financial Group. My job involves working with all areas of the Company to help management develop effective and efficient workflows and procedures. We are also called upon to facilitate large and small groups of people in settings ranging from department staff meetings to Corporate Focus groups. In addition, we work on the development and maintenance of computer systems as well as the research and analysis of new technologies.

We can, at any given time, function as a group leader, technical resource, project member, research and development analyst, counselor, or advisor. Needless to say, there is very little training (classroom or otherwise) to prepare you for this job.

New employees are required to go through four weeks of classroom training. That training is a mixture of the Banking Concept and Problem-Posing education. The first three weeks are Banking Concept: memorizing pre-determined time standards that apply to specific options. The last week of training uses the problem-posing theory. Examples of workflow and procedures are given and each new employee must come up with ways to streamline procedures while concentrating on the job enrichment aspect of each function.

Upon completion, we are given an exam over the pre-determined time standard material. If we pass (and nearly everyone does due to the repetition and memorization of material) we are awarded a certificate stating we are proficient at the task of "setting standards" (telling people how long it *should* take them to do their job). Now we are ready for the "real" world.

My first projects involved one department that utilized my standard-setting skills and six departments that ex-

pected me to streamline workflow and procedures. Unfortunately, my certificate was of little use to those six customers.

There were also no accountabilities in my job description dealing with how well I set standards. However, the number one job requirement was that I identify at least \$250,000 in annual savings every year. Assuming that I was to do this through streamlining, I panicked.

Why would a department develop a training program that gave relatively little information on topics that would be the major focus of the job, and spend so much time, money, and effort teaching us about something that was of so little importance to our customers? Perhaps the Banking Concept of education was a factor.

For the instructor, using the Banking Concept was easier. Especially when you have a fairly tedious subject, a large number of students, and a short, specific time frame to "deposit" the data. For the students, with the exception of myself, it was more familiar. Of the eight of us who went through training together, I was the only person who didn't start this job straight out of college. I think that because I had more work experience within the company, it was easier for me to question the validity of knowing things—like how long does it take for a person to pick up a pen?—but that's what made the Banking Concept especially frustrating for me. I had enough life experience to *know* I didn't understand how we were ultimately going to use this information in our new jobs, but I wasn't brave enough to challenge the instruction approach.

Recently, my boss was agonizing over a hiring decision. He alternates, on a fairly regular basis, between thinking college graduates are the better hiring choice, and thinking that internal transfers make the better job candidate. In one "philosophizing" session, he was expressing his frustration over college students' inability to grasp a concept and research appropriate detail to arrive at a recommendation. He spoke of the college grads' need to be told everything they need to do. "Why can't they just figure out what needs to be done?" he asked. He then went on to

discuss how *he* had always known what to do without anyone telling him. What's the problem with kids these days?

Consider a recent college graduate's background. They've spent 4 or 5 years being told what to study, in which text books, and on what date they'll need to be prepared to discuss which items. It is a very regulated environment where expectations are clearly communicated and success/failure is easily, objectively, measured. Regardless of whether the Banking Concept or Problem Posing Theory is used to illustrate the class content, clearly the Banking Concept is used to formulate the educational process.

Then we bring these same students into our four week job training program where they are told what to study, when to study, and where. Again, success/failure is easily, objectively measured. So far, everyone is comfortable.

Now, we ask these same college graduates to enter an unfamiliar organization with unwritten rules and understood practices. This is their new reality. We tell them they must challenge, overcome, and enhance accepted practices and their success will be evaluated on how well they implement change. What, up to this time, has a college graduate done or learned to prepare himself for this "real" world?

Exactly where does education begin? And who is responsible for ensuring that the educational process will result in an adult person who will be properly equipped to become a positive functioning force in the world? Isn't the educational process the basis by which we learn patterns and thoughts and ideals that mold us for the rest of our lives?

Education is the responsibility of both the learning institution and those that will be employing its students. Schools cannot and should not instruct without the input of members of business, government, and community and if society expects graduates to transition from academia to the "outside" world, they must be accountable for assisting in the financing and curriculum development of schools. There is no point in businesses sitting back and complaining about the lack of skilled clerical workers and at the

same time refuse to support educational programs to develop those skills in students. We are all responsible for guiding the education process.

So, if we are forced to learn through the Banking Concept of education, we will have the ability to recite other people's ideas and interpretations. We will be able to recall dates, places, and important figures in history. But what we will *not* have is the ability to *comprehend* the impact of information on our past, present, or future.

My job requires an ability to comprehend. My job requires I be educated through the Problem-Posing Theory of education. My son requires that I challenge him through illustration and example. He learns more quickly when I explain the effect of right and wrong on himself and others rather than trying to recall a list of what is right and wrong. He needs to know why things are the way they are, not just that it is this way or that way. He pushes authority because he is curious and he wants to know how far he can go. He is not content with a "deposit" of information—he needs to know "why."

My friends, teachers, employers, co-workers, and neighbors challenge me through the same concept. I cannot make decisions, give advice, counsel employees or develop friendships if I haven't experienced and questioned life. If I have only learned what I was told, and no more, then I am only as valuable to my friends and employer to the limit of what I have been taught. Having learned through the Problem-Posing theory of education, I can evaluate the effect people, circumstances, personalities and background have on a similar problem that will result in very different solutions.



A Twenty-Five Second Seduction

Elisha M. O'Bannon
Composition II

Inside an apartment, we watch a brunette, with ratted hair and a flowered scarf for bangs, rub up to and dance with a window sill. Despite the implied coldness of the rain and darkness outside the window, this brunette appears to be attired in a strapless red sheet. As a seductive rhythm drives with the movements of this woman's body, a husky, female, alto voice entices us to, "Get the number!" As if the television hears our subconscious question, "What number?", it produces 1-900-5XX-XXXX at the lower edge of the screen. This phone number is fixed in this position for the next twenty-five seconds.

We flash to a dark skinned, voluptuous woman, wearing a black tank top dress, as she cuddles up to a cushioned red chair. Her leg creeps up the arm rest and eyes roll in delight as she sings, "Just call this number. Now's the time. You can meet new people from this line." Just then the cost for "meeting new people" flashes below the large white numbers and reads Five Dollars Per Minute/Adults Only. Suddenly, this seductress, in the midst of the darkened apartment, is spinning, alone, crazed by the idea of us calling. We see a split second glimpse of a white digital phone on a low bookcase as our eyes focus upon the dancer's hips. Then exhausted from the dance, the dark skinned woman is back in the red chair holding her head. The husky female voice coos, "Get the number!" She then leans back, rolling her eyes like she's waiting for something or someone.

A blink later the head of a blonde fair skinned woman is shown as she lies before an uncovered fire. Over her hair, which takes up a good portion of the screen, she chants out, "Get the number! We'll talk all night. Come on do it now, it'll be alright." Instantly we hear the familiar female voice invite us to, "Get the number. Call now—1-900-5XX-XXXX." As this is heard, flashes of each previously shown woman

are blurred onto the screen. The ratty haired brunette tempts us with a sultry look over her shoulder as the window sill beckons her to continue to dance. Our dark skinned woman heaves her head and chest backward as if we caused her to do so. Despite the constant side to side movement on the floor, we focus upon the blonde's puckering peach lips.

In the final frames of the commercial, a new, Italian looking woman with long dark brown hair, light olive skin, and a low cut white blouse materializes. She croons, "Get the number! Come on, do it!" As the number is said one last time, over the driving drum beats, the husky voice hisses, "Five dollars per minute."

The movements and facial expressions of these four women attempt to motivate their target audience to call the phone number. The service that is being offered is never explicitly described but left up to the viewer to interpret. We could call this number and expect to hear the same sexy music accompanied with minutes of heavy breathing and colorful adjectives. But, we also could use this number to hear a female voice who asks us what we want to talk about and how can she serve us. These "women on the other end" may be trained to be sensitive to the expectations of individual males, thus the experience may be different for each caller. Because the type of service is not explained, a critical viewer naturally questions the source of the message.

The reliability of the source is so disguised that we do not immediately wonder that, when and if we ever call 1-900-5XX-XXXX, we will receive what we expect. The name of the source, Connections One, appears when we are focusing upon the blonde laying in front of the fire. The advertisers are, in a sense, saying it is more important for us to memorize the phone number than it is to consider the actual service or source.

The advertisers are trying to coax their target audience, males, by broadcasting these images late at night when we are less critical and alert. Through research these advertisers have formed a few stereotypes of males and the females

that are supposed to excite these men. They have assumed that because our culture calls for most males to work from nine to five or eight to five, males are not watching TV during the morning or afternoon. Therefore, working males have free time to view TV only in the evening past the dinner hour. The commercial tells us that these men are supposed to be able to be aroused from a twenty-five second commercial of women dancing seductively. What it says about the ideal woman is she's to be young, beautiful, alone, and has no purpose other than to wait around to be stimulated by the viewer. This gives the impression to the male that they are in control when and if they decide to call.

Another assumption about the target audience is that they are not satisfied in their own bedrooms so they seek other avenues of stimulation. The night is also the time when American culture says sexual activity, mystery, and excitement should occur. This commercial is played to catch the attention of those who might fit the advertisers' expectations. Because of the late airing time, subservient images of the women, and sexy music the male target audience may feel they are getting (partially if not fully) satisfied through stimulation. The advertisers don't expect to reach this stereotypical audience after the morning talk shows or before the afternoon cartoons and don't air such commercials then. In these ways the source is attempting to pigeon hole the actions of a group.

Also, the commercial presents four types of shapely women with purpose. In case the punkish brunette or dark skinned woman isn't our ideal the blonde or Italian brown haired women are there to choose from. As each woman is shown, the catch phrase, "Get the number!" is spoken by or over them. It is as if this becomes a personal message from the woman that turns us on the most. If we choose to call this number, we are most likely to associate the voice heard with the individual who most stimulated sexual feelings. But, in reality the woman on the other end most likely would not resemble a Playboy Playmate or be dressed to go out on the town twenty-four hours a day.

The placement of the phone number with respect to the models' bodies was intentionally planned. Part of the commercial the white numbers appear just below the faces of these women. The advertisers are attempting to simulate eye contact between the subject and viewer. The other half of the commercial the numbers are placed upon or just below the bust or hips of the models. In American culture men are conditioned to evaluate a woman not only on the beauty of her face but also the shape of her body. The advertisers have assumed that their male audience is in such a habit and connects the number with the body in full body shots. They believe that eyes will wander to what supposedly interests males—body. It is assumed these parts generally stimulate men's arousal if the proportions are relatively ideal.

In some commercials with call-in phone numbers the spokesperson shows us how to dial and use the phone to gain satisfaction. This is deliberately avoided so that images of the impersonality of the phone do not enter the commercial. It doesn't show a sexy woman cuddling up to a plastic AT&T phone, but up to the camera. This is done to give the men, supposedly watching TV alone, the impression of sexual stimulation in their own living rooms.

These women are portrayed as prostitutes who are already in our homes. Because of their grinding motions and pouting expressions they are telling us that they are ready to be sexually stimulated. They are consenting to . . . have sex vicariously over the phone. Whether or not they "talk dirty" when we call is not the point. Advertisers have pinned down their stereotype of a male that they created these images to give such an impression. The source of the commercial is using sexually arousing images to sell a service that supplies only a voice and listening ear.



This Is Nursing?

Marcia Stamper
Composition II

"Go to Hell!" This phrase may not sound very professional, but negative thoughts are apt to cross your mind on a bad day after a confrontation with a stressed-out physician. Occasional negative thoughts are normal, but when these thoughts interfere with patient care, it is a sure sign of nursing burnout. An accurate definition of nursing burnout is carrying out only the absolutely necessary actions without adding the tender loving care that patients so often appreciate. It is a very personal phenomenon, yet highly contagious among staff members. In talking with some of my colleagues, I picked up on their feelings concerning patient care: stagnation, ineffectiveness, and giving generic patient care. Two of these terms also appeared in one of my nursing journal articles, so there must be some universal feelings among professionals.

The primary cause of nursing burnout, I believe, stems from experiences in nursing school. While in school, instructors protect students from confrontations with irate physicians, the everyday routine of stressful situations, and inadequately staffed units. Of course, when I was a student working on different units, I ran into a few grouchy, superficial nurses, but I minimized these experiences by thinking they were probably having a "bad day." In all reality, they were probably having one of many bad days, weeks, or even months. Reflecting on those experiences, I wonder how their patients were treated. Now that I think about it, I had only one instructor who mentioned to us what it would really be like when we got out on our own; she was working as an intensive care nurse, as well as teaching. After graduation, the uninitiated nurse believes she will be in the ideal job situation, do great deeds for her patients, and have uneventful relations with the physicians. We, as students, were truly looking at the real world through rose-colored glasses.

Little does the fresh graduate nurse know that she will fall victim to the Supernurse Syndrome, another cause of burnout. This is a phrase that my classmates and I used to describe our feelings of the real world. The real job situation is all too often plagued with too many patients and not enough hands and time to provide the tender loving care we were taught to *always* give our patients. The nursing shortage has had an impact on the personalization of patient care. Nurses, as well as physicians, may begin to depersonalize patients by referring to them by their diseases rather than their names strictly because they are overworked and under stress to care for more and more patients. Overemphasizing the technical aspects of care is another part of the Supernurse Syndrome especially affecting ICU nurses because they begin to see only the many machines that are vital for their patients' life support. As a surgical nurse, I sometimes get too focused on getting the physicians' orders carried out in the eight hours I am at work and begin to forget about back rubs and one-to-one conversations with my patients. When I do offer a back rub, which I do almost every night, the patients often seem surprised as if no other nurse has offered to take a few minutes for a little TLC.

Reality Shock is the third and most discouraging cause of burnout. As a young graduate, one comes out of school with a real commitment to one's profession, one of caring and promoting health for people. Her ambition to heal becomes marred with disappointment when reality hits, and she realizes that not everyone can be completely cured. This syndrome is prevalent in new graduates entering the field of oncology. In this field it is truly the TLC that matters and when the nurse runs out of time for little warm touches and smiles that mean the most she gets discouraged. She comes face to face with what "she finds in the hospital setting, 'what I was taught' and 'what I want to believe' clash with 'what really is' " (Storlie 2109). Reality Shock can make a nurse question her morals and second guess her ideals. "Burnout is resignation to a lack of power—the perception

that no matter what you do or how hard you try, you cannot make a difference in the situation" (Storlie 2109).

Nurses in all areas of the field of nursing have the potential to contract this contagious phenomenon in some form or another and in different degrees of severity. Only three of the numerous causes of burnout have been mentioned. Many more exist. Be warned that demoralizing and destructive thoughts towards physicians and patients can affect your care before you know it.

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The Price of Success

Shannon L. Haus
Composition II

"The Achievement of Desire" by Richard Rodriguez is a successful attempt to show the universality of his experience in leaving home and community to join another type of environment. A community of education. Rodriguez saw the school environment as a society of knowledge, much like I do, in contrast to the working class student's homelife where the importance of being educated is too often ignored. Common lay people tend to emphasize the importance of working, instead of encouraging the student to go to or to stay in college. The working class parents look at only what is right before them, negating the rewards that education can bring their child, by encouraging the child towards a full time job and immediate income. The working class student is motivated to do well by the dream of going to college and becoming somebody. I could not begin to count the times I've thought "I just can't wait until I get away from home and on to the University of Iowa. If I work hard then I'll have a chance to really be someone, to really make a difference, unlike my father."

I sit in the college library sifting through constitutional law books to find a case that my criminal law teacher said we would be going over in class tomorrow. I know I'll be called on to go over the case. I always am. Tomorrow I'll be asked a lot of questions and I will know the answers. How do I know this? Because I studied a little more than everyone else. I always want the edge. I've got to have the edge. I would hate to be caught without the correct answer. This is humiliation. If the work has been done and I answer everything correctly, I will be feeling very good afterward. Very proud and satisfied.

Other students seem to be less motivated than I am. I really am unsure as to why. Maybe they lack confidence. Perhaps they are afraid to give their best effort in fear of confirming their mediocrity, so, ironically they do a half-

ass job and get a "C" or a "B", if they are lucky. They can say "and I didn't even try very hard!"

These people will never get too far ahead in their lives because they are unmotivated. They take what they are given and attempt nothing more. I want more. Mediocrity is the satisfaction of being average. Being average won't get me the best in life. It definitely will not get me into law school. The mere act of studying intensely for hours each day shows desire, a burning desire to become something more than average. I'm talking about the desire to achieve goals that are obtained from climbing a mountain of knowledge; a mountain, a barrier to many but a challenge to me.

When I was twelve, my parents divorced while my mother was finishing up her degree in computer programming. My mother had to work very hard to do well at school (she finished her degree with a 3.5 grade point average) because she was also raising both a twelve and a seven year old child. My mother worked hard to do the very best job she knew how. She had the desire to be better than average, even though the odds were against her. My mother remarried a bank vice president who also is an over-achiever. Both my mother and step-father are supportive of my education. But, of course there is my father.

You see, my father comes from a poor working class family. He does not appreciate college at all. My father thinks I should get done with school as soon as possible so that I can get out and make money. As much as I try to make my dad understand, he still does not appreciate education the way I wish he did. My father believes that continuing education after high school is an excuse not to work. In Rodriguez's essay he points out that his father "teased me for having soft hands. (He seemed to sense that some great achievement of leisure was implied by my papers and books)" (509). Voila! In Rodriguez's writing I have found someone else whose father believes his son goes to school and studies in the same way that a person would take a vacation. If only they could understand that labor with the mind takes the same toll on a person as does labor with the body.

The fact that my father is uneducated has been the cause of embarrassment for me much as it was for Rodriguez. There have been times when girlfriends have asked to meet my father. Each time I just know that he will say something really stupid. My dad usually drinks beer after he gets off work at the lumber yard and this adds to my anxiety. He's not an angry drunk or anything. It's just that it makes him seem that much less educated because he says a lot of really dumb things. This causes me to fear I will lose the girl for sure (as if I couldn't accomplish this task on my own)! I assume that somehow the girl will think that I am going to be like him—and then zap! She's gone. Usually this does not turn out to be the case though. Whoever I'm with usually ends up really liking my dad. Most of the people who meet him like him because he is supposedly funny and a real nice guy. Needless to say I usually wind up feeling guilty for being ashamed. Once again the universality of Rodriguez's work applies. Rodriguez stated "I heard my father speak to my teacher and felt ashamed of his labored, accented words. Then guilty of the shame" (506). The majority of Rodriguez's ideas from the preceding quote apply with the difference being that I was embarrassed while my father was talking with my friends whereas Rodriguez was embarrassed in front of his teacher. I would never want my father to meet any of my instructors. I've always been afraid that if an instructor of mine met my father they might think that I'm not as smart as they may have previously believed.

With intense study habits more isolation from family and friends is necessary. This tradeoff is essential to achieve academic success. A good student needs to have quiet to achieve successful scores in class. The process that takes place is a life experience that will, I believe, in the long run, make the student a better person. This process could begin at any age, but as for me it happened upon entering college.

The process starts with a youngster who enjoys being with his family and friends. From this point there is a transition into the serious student. The "scholarship boy" realizes that he must sacrifice time previously spent with

friends and family to study in pursuit of academic success. Rodriguez is a good example of this. Rodriguez said

I kept so much, so often to myself. Sad. Enthusiastic. Troubled by the excitement of coming upon new ideas. Eager. Fascinated by the promising textures of a brand-new book. I hoarded the pleasures of learning. Alone for hours. Enthralled. Nervous. I rarely looked away from my books—or back on my memories (506).

I believe this is the loneliest yet the most mentally satisfying period of the student's life. The student must fight any urges or desires to go out. When I go out I constantly remind myself that this one night could cause me to get a "B" instead of an "A". Constantly weighing each move in my head, I always ask myself, "If I do this today what might it cost me tomorrow?" One wrong move could be the difference in rising to the challenge of doing the homework and failing in class. At the end of this stage comes the end of formal education. Now the former student is able to use the vast amounts of knowledge he has obtained to achieve success in life outside of the halls of education. With this success the former student will have opportunities to meet many new and exciting people. He will also have the opportunity to spend time with his family. The years of loneliness are over and a life of social happiness will begin; hence, the student realizes that the loneliness earlier in life was worth it. The tradeoff pays off by giving the former working class student things that he would not have obtained without the education—such as an opportunity to live a more comfortable lifestyle by giving the student the security of college degrees. A person with a college degree is more attractive to prospective employers than those who don't have one.

The former student comes away a better person. Now the boy who only spent time with books is an adult who truly appreciates the things in life that many people take for granted. The former student enjoys a nice walk in the park

and spending time with family and friends (something he would never had time to do as a student).

Rodriguez tells us of this ability to appreciate the things so often taken for granted. In his essay "The Achievement of Desire" Rodriguez, after completing his dissertation, returned home from England and wrote that he felt "relieved by how easy it was to be at home. It no longer seemed very important to me that we had little to say. I felt easy sitting and eating and walking with them" (519).

The cycle is finished and at last the final brick is placed in the wall of education. The experience has changed the student (it is changing us now) from a one-sided person to a fully rounded individual who can appreciate the finer things in life (such as money, cars, etc.—he earned it), and the smaller things in life such as talking to family and taking walks in the park (the former student cares for the things that he hadn't had time for while in school).

This process is a sacrifice that in the long run will make a person better. The sad part is that some people are not able or willing to make the sacrifice to be a better student and person. I'm enjoying the challenge. With dedication and faith, perhaps I will become a better person. Of course, only the Lord knows for certain what the end of education shall bring each one of us.

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Home Vs. School Not Always a Conflict of Cultures

Christian Mueller
Composition II

I sit in the English classroom—"the student"—attempting to identify with Richard Rodriguez' in-depth description of the scholarship boy, as my class discusses his essay "The Achievement of Desire." In this, Rodriguez paints a vivid picture of a particular persona. One who is obsessed with academic progress. One who is driven by the pleasures of "first-learning" (505). But at the same time, one who is sad, nervous, and troubled by the harsh realization that he is being torn from his family and culture. (Yet this only intensifies his passion.)

Throughout the essay the author makes reference to the fact that everyone experiences a conflict of cultures: Home and family vs. school and teachers. He writes, "... the scholarship boy must move between environments, his home and the classroom, which are at cultural extremes, opposed" (502). He makes the assumption that the two are very different, and he insists upon the universality of the situation. But in reading the essay, I had a very hard time naturalizing this idea.

For example, Rodriguez, borrowing from Richard Hoggart's "The Uses of Literacy," describes the scholarship boy—the author himself—at home:

... [The scholarship boy] sees strewn around, and reads regularly himself, magazines which are never mentioned at school, which seem not to belong to the world to which the school introduces him; at school he hears about and reads books never mentioned at home. When he brings these books into the house they do not take their place with other books which the family are reading, for often there are none or

almost none; his books look, rather, like strange tools (510).

This could not be further from what I experienced at home: The yellow bindings of *National Geographic* filled the entire bottom tier of one of our two bookshelves. Books by Sinclair Lewis and Truman Capote took their place next to the oversized, colorful covers of those by Richard Scarry and Sid Hoff. Also, a trip to the coffee table could provide me with all I needed to know about *Ancient Civilizations*, *Our Fifty States*, or *Pandas*. For me, home and school were anything but cultural opposites. In fact, they were similar—for I was educated in both places—and I do not think I am alone.

The distinguishing factor between Richard Rodriguez and myself is that my parents were educated. The author tells of his father who "left school to work as an 'apprentice' for an uncle" (508), and ended up working "a dark succession of warehouse, cannery, and factory jobs" (508). He also described his mother as "... a girl new to America [who] had been awarded a high school diploma by teachers too careless or busy to notice that she hardly spoke English" (507). My father, on the other hand, earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Omaha (now UNO) and graduated from the law school at George Washington University. My mother attended Wayne State College. The fact that my parents were educated and Rodriguez' were not underlies quite a few other differences between them, and ultimately accounts for the contrast between my home environment and subsequent outlook on education, and the author's.

Relating to what I previously mentioned about the multitude of books around my house, the obvious reason for this points out one of the several differences between Rodriguez' parents and mine: My parents read for pleasure; they read for fun. I especially have a vivid memory of my father reading in bed at night just before going to sleep. (Mark Twain). Rodriguez, however, writes that his parents' reading habits were quite the opposite of mine: "For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of

necessity and as quickly as possible. Never did I see either of them read an entire book. Nor did I see them read for pleasure (510). But reading is not the only difference.

My parents thought logically about situations. They used reason in making decisions. ("Station-wagons are more practical.") In fact, as a result of this, I was raised so that I have a hard time accepting ideas that do not have logical explanations. (Save religion!) The author is describing his own situation when he writes, "Lavish emotions texture homelife. *Then*, at school, the instruction bids him to trust lonely reason primarily. Immediate needs set the pace of his parents' lives. From his mother and father the boy learns spontaneity and non-rational ways of knowing" (502, 3). This just absolutely did not hold true for me. Furthermore, my experiences led to something more.

I learned from my parents. Not only socially, but academically as well. If my memory serves correct, they corrected me more than I corrected them. ("Ain't isn't a word.") But in Rodriguez' case, he is referring to himself as he writes ". . . he goes home and sees in his parents a way of life not only different but starkly opposed to that of the classroom. (He enters the house and hears his parents talking in ways his teachers discourage)" (503). For him, this just furthered the separation between home and school, and sparked a bit of discontentment between him and his parents. Now, although they are following two separate—and opposite—paths, Rodriguez' and my attitudes for our respective parents are deepening.

When I had a question or a problem with something, I came to my parents. Be it schoolwork, my sister, or anything else, I asked my parents for help and they never failed me. I began to treat my parents like I did my teachers—as the authority on the matter. It was my parents that I wanted to be like. Rodriguez, on the other hand, makes it clear that he did not see this in his parents; he wanted to become like his teachers:

When I was in high school, I admitted to my mother that I planned to become a teacher

someday. That seemed to please her. But I never tried to explain that it was not the occupation of teaching I yearned for as much as it was something more elusive: I wanted to *be* like my teachers, to possess their knowledge, to assume their authority, their confidence, even to assume a teacher's persona (508).

In fact, Rodriguez even takes it a step further. He is convinced that "he cannot afford to admire his parents. . . . He permits himself embarrassment at their lack of education" (504). The author personalizes this when he writes, ". . . I heard my father speak to my teacher and felt ashamed of his labored, accented words" (506). There is finally an end to all this, for Rodriguez, and for myself.

The ends—for both of us—are quite definitely, and not surprisingly, opposites. Rodriguez finally grew away, or separated himself from his previous culture and, more importantly, from his parents. "From the very first days, through the years following," he writes, "it will be with his parents—the figures of lost authority, the persons toward whom he feels deepest love—that the change will be most powerfully measured. A separation will unravel between them" (504). I, on the other hand, grew closer and more similar to my parents. Little by little, I gradually rose to their level. My education, both at home and at school, helped me to mature to a point equal to them.

The whole point of the matter is simply this: My home environment and my school environment were *not* culturally opposed. In my situation it was because *my* parents had been educated, and my education was merely following the norm. (No cultural differences.) The same would have held true if, for instance, my parents had been laborers, and I became a laborer. (Again, no cultural differences.) The conflict only arises when the child "breaks the mold" of the parents. This was clearly the case for Rodriguez, but clearly not the case for me. But since not everyone breaks their parents' mold—as my experience will testify—Rodriguez' story simply cannot be viewed as universal.

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Younger Than Today

Ron Jones
Composition II

*When I was younger, so much younger than
today,
I never needed anybody's help in any way.
But now these days are gone, I'm not so self
assured.
Now I find I've changed my mind, I've opened up
the doors.*

—From the song, "Help"
(Lennon and McCartney 36)

This essay is written in memory of all those fallen angels who have crossed over into the shadowlands, but especially for my friend, the late Rock Guitarist, Tommy Bolin.

*Didn't we break the silence; didn't we mix our
blood; didn't we call down the spirits; didn't we
die for love?* (Robbie Robertson)

I have attempted to write this in the form of a Rock & Roll song. There are three verses and a chorus. The quotations sprinkled throughout are meant to be similar to the bass and drums in rock, i.e. they provide that funky bottom from which the solo instruments—in this case, paragraphs—can take off and improvise over. Hopefully, this adds to the texture of the essay, if not to the content. One always hopes one can have it both ways. As with rock, the content here is less important than the tone or overall mood of the piece. Abandonment within a form was what I was after.

During the always difficult process of writing, hard choices must be made. The many conferences with my composition instructor and much struggle on my part all seemed to translate into this: "Let yourself go." This experiment is the result.

OVERTURE

America is a hurricane, and the only people who do not hear the sound are those fortunate if incredibly stupid and smug White Protestants who live in the center, in the serene eye of the big wind. They cannot possibly know what it is like to start your life from the outside and try to reach the center, indeed they do not care to know, not really, not most of them—I sometimes think they would rather see the Republic go over to the Russians than to the discords of the sexual underground (Mailer 357).

*I was born in a crossfire hurricane
And I howled at my Ma in the driving rain
But it's all right now, in fact it's a gas
I'm Jumpin' Jack Flash
It's a gas, gas, gas (Jagger and Richard 193).*

FIRST VERSE

Rock music and I arrived in America at about the same time. I was born in 1948, and the date of rock's birth is usually given as 1951, when disc jockey Alan Freed first used the phrase "rock n' roll." But while my father was a white middle class postal worker, rock's father was the musical form called blues. As Freed has said, "It began on the levees and plantations, took in folk songs, and features blues and rhythm" (Traum 7). Blues originated in the Mississippi delta and moved northward into urban areas like Memphis, Tennessee; St. Louis, Missouri; and Chicago, Illinois. It was no accident that rock's first great idol and sex symbol, Elvis Presley, came from the delta town of Tupelo, Mississippi. His first hit records, sung in consciously imitative blues stylings, were written by black delta artists. Presley's renditions of "That's Allright," by Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, and "Hound Dog," by Willy Mae

"Big Mama" Thornton, were instant successes among white youth. What Presley and others, like black musician Chuck Berry, did was to take the texts of the blues and set them against an electrified uptempo rhythm of repetitive chords on piano or guitar and an accentuated off-beat on the drums. The result was rock and roll, and it was irresistible. It made for an immediate and emotionally charged musical experience. And it was the most sexually expressive music white America had ever heard.

The screaming, idiotic words, and savage music of these records are undermining the morals of our white youth in America (Southern segregationist poster).

Both Presley and Berry gyrated wildly onstage. They would prance around and hold their guitars out from between their legs in daring phallic gestures. And we saw it all on the relatively new medium of television. That is, we saw what wasn't censored. When Elvis appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show," he was shown only from the waist up since his performance was deemed by the network to be too suggestive for us to watch. As is often the case with censorship, this had the opposite effect of the one intended. It simply emphasized the erotic possibilities by leaving the performance to our imagination. With his long, dark, greased hair and sideburns and his surly good looks, he radiated sexuality and rebellion. And the tight, hot, driving music he played was even further from what white middle class America was used to.

Beethoven is a seducer who uses his music as a means of sensual titillation (Leo Tolstoy).

Rock was immediately criticized as being crude and vulgar. I remember my mother wanting to attend an Elvis Presley concert in 1956 and not being able to find anyone willing to go with her. She was finally talked out of this "foolish" idea by her friends and my father who said her

going to a rock and roll show would have a negative effect on me. Many of my friends were forbidden to listen to rock music. But the more the parents rejected it, the more the kids seemed to love it. And I can't help but wonder if my life wouldn't have been different, if I still would have fallen so deeply into the whole rock scene, if I too had been forbidden to listen to it. At any rate, rock was simply fun to listen to. I had no idea at the time that it would play a major role in shaping the lifestyles and sexual expressions of myself and a great many others of my generation.

*You can squeeze my lemon babe, til' the juice run
down my leg* (Robert Johnson 136).

The objections to rock have never been based so much upon the physical sexuality of its performers as upon the possibilities of the texts of the music itself. The texts in this instance are those combinations of sounds, lyrics, and cultural expressions which make up the musical form. The extension of any music is the culture from which it derives and in which it is enjoyed. That culture is expressed and reflected in its music by the use of symbol and ritual in an evocative rather than in a cognitive fashion. What, after all, is any art including music, if not symbolism? Musical texts in particular are emotional in that they apply to man's inner nature. Music is rational only in a mathematical sense. But its meaning is in the power of evocation. The lyrics of rock and blues are arguments of passion rather than of logic. It is in the patterns and symbols of rock, then, that connections lie.

*Scarred old slaver know he's doin alright, hear
him whip the women just around midnight.
Brown Sugar, how come you taste so good?
Brown Sugar, just like a black girl should*
(Jagger and Richard 313).

The appropriation of the music of one culture by another—which is the case here, where the texts of the blues were

taken out of their cultural context by young whites—is to alter the meaning of the music. The blues cannot be the exact same thing for me as it was for a rural African-American of the 1930's. At the same time that its original representations remain intact, its uses are changed. As sociologist and rock critic Simon Frith says, "Different listeners use the same music for quite different ends" (Frith 63). But because the representations remain, they also become part of the experience of the listener. This is what is meant by the statement "Musical texts are volatile" (Frith 63). It is this volatility which was simultaneously feared by our elders and desired by ourselves. And it was in the texts of the blues, which are the roots of rock, that the possibilities to make connections became apparent to us.

BRIDGE

The difficulty in talking about rock is that its essential truths lie in the experience of the music itself. I would like to make an attempt at getting some of those truths since I know that who I am today is intimately bound up in my participation in rock. And one writes, I believe, in order to find out a little more about oneself and thus about the human condition. It may be that the most fundamental ways in which the music shaped my own sexuality can ultimately only be found within that experience. Fortunately, however, some things can still be had through the use of words.

SECOND VERSE

*Maybe I'm too outspoken, but I don't feel it's
right for me to simply smile and say everything
is fine when it's not fine (Ray Phiri).*

In the mid 1960's a growing disillusionment with the government's conduct of the war in Vietnam, coupled with the natural inclination toward rebellion as young people attempted to discover and express their identity, caused

many of us to find parallels between blues culture and our own situation. We saw ourselves as living in a sexually repressed and increasingly violent society: A society in which we had next to no say in the determination of our own destinies. To be a teen in 1966 was to experience the tension of contradictions, "the opposition of what can be imagined to what-is" (Frith 268). The blues in rock reflected this and brought to us a shared sense of community. Blues is a music of an oppressed people. Paul Oliver says, "For one reason alone are Blacks to be found on the American continent: the enslavement of their ancestors" (Oliver 12). Their music has been shaped by this experience, and out of it has come a rich mosaic that realistically represents the hopes, dreams, and lives of a people. It is earthy, existential, and animistic. As is the case with the art of any oppressed group, there exists in this African-America music, the element of rebellion. Simon Frith quotes blues scholar Paul Garon who says blues are an

aggressive and uncompromising assertion of the omnipotence of desire in the face of all resistances.... Blues are poems of revolt against: the degradation of language, the repressive forces of the church, the police, the family and the ruling class, against the inhibition of sexuality and aggression, against the general repugnance of everyday life (Frith 20).

Rebellion, like sexuality, involves both opposition and abandonment. What was done in the re-ordering of the blues texts into rock was to take the sexuality of the music and place it in opposition to the violence of society, and it was this idea of sexual rebellion as political ideology which was at the core of 60's rock. The most obvious example was the ubiquitous slogan of the times, "Make love, not war." The music was ours; it gave us a sense of community, of belonging to something greater than ourselves, and we made the slogans and the texts a reality through the medium. We attempted to live out the abandonment im-

plicit in the immediacy of rock. We became the "Woodstock Generation," recognizable to one another by our long hair, unisex clothing, and the sweet raunch of this funky music of the loins. Political statements could be made with sex, and sexuality could be opposed to violence. We held love-ins, burned bras and draft cards; we could even "fuck for peace." But peace didn't come. We have been able to help make a sexual revolution but we didn't have the power necessary to make changes in society. The possibilities of sex, drugs, and rock and roll were also the possibilities of frustration. We still couldn't "get no satisfaction."

To live outside the law you must be honest (Bob Dylan 95).

The rock experience of the 60's and 70's was an experiment in sensual gratification through sex, drugs, and rock and roll. We had engaged ourselves in a process of opening "the doors of perception." If new sexual freedoms were seen in opposition to the violence inherent in society, they were also seen as predisposed to rock and drugs, both of which enhanced sexual pleasure. For both, the use of drugs and participation in rock, involve self-abandonment through ritualized behaviors. Ritual is one of the main components of the addictive process, and a rock concert is, of course, a communal rite. Sexuality too is expressed through ritual; even so-called "free" or experimental sex has limits, and limits are what we find ourselves within. So, the opening up of sexual expression also demanded new rituals for its enjoyment. If one were now free to have sex casually with as many partners as one wished, or as Steven Stills put it, "If you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with" then rituals were needed to stabilize and make sense of the experience. One of the possibilities of sex, drugs, and rock and roll experiments has always been that they might very well end up by becoming their own rationale.

THIRD VERSE

*I hit the city, and I lost my band.
I watched the needle take another man
Oh, oh, the damage done (Neil Young).*

Rock was always a commodity. It was a product to be packaged and sold for profit, but it remained ideologically volatile. The youth culture who consumed it and the artists who made it, continued to demand that ideology of the music. We maintained an outlaw stance while exploring alternative sexual and pharmacological routes. David Crosby sang of a menage a trois in his song Triad:

*What can we do now that we both love you?
I love you too.
I don't really see, why can't we go on as three?
You are afraid, embarrassed too.
No one has ever said such a thing to you.
Your mother's ghost stands at your shoulder
face like ice, a little bit colder.
sayin' to you, "You cannot do that; it breaks all
the rules you learned in school."
I don't really see, why can't we go on as three?
(Airplane)*

What is important here is the idea of exploration; that any sexual, rock, or drug induced fantasy could become a reality. Implied in this is the assumption of a return to the point of origin, so that one may digest the experience. Critic Robert Christgau writes, "Rock and roll is not something that you believe in, in that onanistic, self-reflexive way that has vitiated so much modernist art. It is something that you do to get somewhere else" (Frith 165). But as many in the rock culture have found out, it is not always possible to get back from that "somewhere else."

*I've seen the best minds of my generation de-
stroyed by madness, starving hysterical na-
ked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets
at dawn looking for an angry fix*
(Ginsberg 182).

This is not the sexual ideology one would generally associate with the blues which usually speaks about the emotional realities and the physical pleasures of male/female relationships. Blues songs in which triangular love interests appear are often stories of jealousy and retribution. Or they are wryly humorous and accepting of a situation, as in the lines from one of these songs which goes "*Man, I'm drunk again. I been drinkin' Gordon's gin. / Well, my wife has quit me and my girlfriend too. I don't know what I'll do.*" But they have little to do with exploration or with lessons to be learned.

In 1970 I had a friend who was a 67-year-old black musician, and who had played piano for the legendary Billie Holiday in the 1940's. I used to go over to his place and jam blues with him from time to time. One night when I walked in his door, I found him with a bottle of whisky in his hand, lurching around the living room, chasing after two very naked high school girls. "Palmer," I said, "Don't you think you're a little old for this sort of thing? He stopped, grinned and said, "Ron, if pussy kill me, man I don't mind dyin'." It wasn't experimentation or a redefinition of sexual identity he was after, but an immediate good time. A somewhat dissimilar though nonetheless existential view was given by Joni Mitchell to these outlaw possibilities in her 1971 song "Blue,"

*Acid, booze, and ass
Needles, guns, and grass
lots of laughs, lots of laughs
Well everybody's saying that hell's the hippest
way to go
Well I don't think so
But I'm gonna take a look around it though.*

Mitchell thought, as many of us did at the time, that one could play dangerous games with volatile materials and return wiser for the experience. And it is true that rock exists on the edge. But if for us, rock was a dance of life, it was also a dance with death. The existential edge could quickly turn into the nightmare of the abyss when one went from "wearing flowers in your hair" (McKenzie) to sending funeral wreaths to the families of friends who had pushed the limits too far. It has been my experience that when one consistently experiments with rock culture over a period of years, one ends up either dead or living the blues.

CHORUS

*Don't let your mind post toastie like a lot of my
friends did (Tommy Bolin).*

My friend Palmer could never have subscribed to Mitchell's lyric. He wouldn't even have understood it. He could never "take a look around it." He was inside of it, and in his world you don't have the luxury of exploration; you're too busy trying to get a little something, anything, to make you feel better. If you are looking at anything, as the saying goes, you are looking up at down. On the landscape of the blues, you just do it because it's there and you might not have another chance at it, even if—no, especially if, you are 67 years old and you've got a bottle, and a little dope, and two white high school chicks in your pad. As Bob Dylan sang, "*When you ain't got nothin', you got nothin' to lose.*"

UNDERTURE

*Wild thing,
You make my heart sing.
You make everything groovy
(The Troggs).*



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Dune: From Book To Box Office

Phillip Morgan
Introduction to Mass Media

If you've ever seen a movie that was adapted from a novel and said to yourself, "It just wasn't as good as the book," then you probably have some idea of the inherent problems involved in condensing a carefully written novel into a workable and visually exciting screenplay.

The origin of the problem is the basic disparity between the two mediums. Writing is pure abstraction; the process by which an author commits his/her thoughts and visual imagery to the abstract form of words to be seen by readers who convert these words back into thoughts and visual imagery of their own. If words are chosen and put together well, then the potential exists for readers to experience essentially the same thoughts as the author. Of course, this process is not entirely controlled by the author. Readers will interpret meaning and form visual imagery according to their own beliefs and experiences. Movies, on the other hand, tend to be primarily visual. There is dialogue between characters and occasional narration, but the visual imagery is ready-made. The message is still subject to personal interpretation but with viewers being spoon-fed images, abstraction is significantly reduced, making it more likely that interpretations will be similar.

We have not only come to accept the differences between print and film media, we expect them. Both satisfy our need for escapism, but they do so in different ways. Through books, we use someone else's imagination to prompt and explore our own. Through films, we explore someone else's imagination, using our own only to grant temporary credibility to the story. *Dune*, by Frank Herbert (1965), is one of hundreds of science fiction novels to be made into a motion picture. The film, written and directed by David Lynch, was released in 1985. While the success of Herbert's novel is unquestionable, the movie, an elaborate production, proved to be a flop. It left many audiences disap-

pointed and many critics laughing. Regardless of its overall failure, the film successfully overcame many obstacles in adapting text to cinema.

While Lynch made considerable variations from the novel in making the movie, the basic story of *Dune* was relatively unchanged. Character and conceptual changes were necessary to "make visual" an extremely complex plot with deep, well-developed characters.

Many of the changes are, for the most part, exaggerations of the characters' personalities. This is done in order for the audience to comprehend a particular character's part within the overall story and to show the essence of that character's personality, without the benefit of time (and pages) to fully develop them. For example, the movie depicted the Baron Vladimir Harkonnen as a sadistic lunatic with grotesque boils all over his body. He had "heart plugs" surgically implanted in all his people and could kill them simply by pulling the plug and letting all the blood drain from their bodies. In the book, Baron Harkonnen was sadistic and evil and, as depicted in the movie, was exceedingly fat and needed a gravity suit to support his weight. The boils on his face and the heart plugs are inventions of the movie. They are visual devices used to convey to the audience a hatred and disgust for the character in a quick, dramatic, and easily comprehensible way. Duke Leto Atreides, father of Paul Atreides (the hero of *Dune*), is portrayed in the movie as somewhat weak and naive. In the book he was neither. He was, in fact, quite cunning and the only apparent threat to the power of the Emperor. He was the victim of treachery from all sides and made vulnerable by complex political maneuvering. Such intricacies would be virtually impossible to portray on film and still hold the attention of the general audience. It is easier (and arguably more effective for the movie) to build up to the downfall of the Duke by portraying him as a victim of his own ineptness rather than to reveal the underlying politics of the situation. The treachery involved was still revealed but with minimal explanation.

In addition to characters, certain concepts in the book were too abstract to be faithfully depicted in the movie. Whole systems of religion, politics, and social order were described in great detail in the book. For obvious reasons, only the most essential details of these concepts could be revealed in the movie. For example, the Bene Gesserit, a society of women whom Herbert modeled after the Jesuits, used a form of witchcraft called "the way" or "the weirding way." The book tells how Paul's mother was a member of the Bene Gesserit and trained him in the weirding way, which was strictly against the rules of the Bene Gesserit order—only daughters were to be trained. After the defeat of his father, Paul became the leader of the Fremen, natural inhabitants of the planet Arrakis (commonly called "Dune") and enemies of the Harkonnens and the Emperor. Paul teaches the Fremen the weirding way so they can fight the imperial forces who destroyed his father's house. Since it would have been difficult to visually demonstrate "the weirding way," Lynch introduced "weirding modules"—weapons that required special training to use. These were shown as a secret weapon discovered and used by Duke Leto and his troops. Through an act of sabotage, the modules were destroyed before they could be used by Duke Leto's troops to defend against a surprise attack by Harkonnen and Imperial forces. When Paul meets the Fremen he teaches them to use the weirding modules, instead of the weirding way as in the book (how more modules were produced after the Duke's were destroyed is not explained). The change in the story was necessary in order to replace the concept of the weirding way with the weirding modules. The physical existence of the modules, as opposed to the intangible knowledge of the "way," needed to be established before Paul met the Fremen. This is an example of how Lynch tried to facilitate the audience's understanding of the story by altering some part of it to better fit the motion picture medium. The end result of the story in both the book and the movie remains the same—Paul made the Fremen great fighters—but it does so in a way that is easier for the audience to follow.

In addition to its successful transformation of characters and concepts from text to screen, *Dune* was a visually striking movie. The characters and their settings were otherworldly, yet believable. This is important because it allows the audience to identify with the characters and escape reality through them. Such escapism is arguably the most important function of a motion picture or novel.

Unfortunately, despite the competent visual representation and good cinematography, Lynch tried, unsuccessfully, to make the film satisfy two different audiences. He tried to appeal to the general audience by making the story easy to understand and fit in the usual 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 hours of running time of most motion pictures. He also tried to appeal to the large following of *Dune* readers by remaining faithful to the original story as much as possible. The end result was a movie that was so chopped up and unsuccessfully narrated that it appealed to neither audience. Those who didn't read the book couldn't understand the progression of the story and those who did read the book were irritated by the number of important scenes narrated through or left out completely.

The end of the movie was its furthest departure from the original story. As with many motion pictures, it was also a weak point. While the book ends abruptly, it does so very effectively, with the culmination of events throughout the book, but not a tidy summation. It leaves open the possibility for a continuation but doesn't leave the reader hanging. The movie, however, tries a quick completion by rationalizing all events of the story through a forecast of new, happy times to come. Such pathetic endings are typical of what are otherwise good films. It would seem that an author of a novel has more freedom in the way he can end a book while directors feel constrained by the expectations of the general audience and limited to the "happy ending."

As a reader I often try to visualize the story of a novel as a movie. This is, no doubt, due to living in the age of Hollywood. Few novels make truly good movies, or rather few movies from novels are done truly well. If you compare the success of a science fiction movie like *Star Wars* with

the failure of a movie like *Dune*, it soon becomes apparent that the difference lies in the story and its structure. The absolute simplicity of *Star Wars* and its straight forward depictions of good and evil, suit the story for cinema. *Dune*, with all its complexities, could only be comprehended in its entirety in print. In an interview with psychologist Ross Stagner for *Psychology Today* (October 1984, p. 74), Herbert himself said, "I try to give people experiences that they could not have any other way, take them to places they have never experienced, where they witness events that could not occur except on that page."



TV on TV News

Christine Flynn
Introduction to Mass Media

America has a seemingly unquenchable appetite for programs about the Law, the police, doctors and more recently, the Press, especially TV media. Each season there are usually several shows about Lawyers (L.A. Law, Law and Order, Equal Justice, The Trials of Rosie O'Neill, etc.), police/detectives (Cop Rock, Cops) doctors (Doctor, Doctor; Doogie Howser, MD) and two prime-time shows about TV news, "Murphy Brown" and "WIOU." There seems to be a need for the public to see news broadcasters with all their human frailties, perhaps for the emotional satisfaction of seeing such characters as ridiculous in contrast to the adulation reserved for real life anchors such as Walter Cronkite. Perhaps seeing such edified beings in such a personal, human way allows real life broadcasters to retain their god-like status!

"Murphy Brown" is a half-hour show on Monday nights on CBS. The character Murphy Brown (Candice Bergen) is a forty-ish, aggressive senior anchor for a Washington, D.C. weekly news program, F.Y.I. F.Y.I. is a toney, "serious" format such as "60 Minutes" or "20/20," and prides itself on being "seriousjournalism." The success of "Murphy Brown" is largely due to the inspired characters—Jim Dial, senior co-anchor who speaks in wooden monotones; Corky Sherwood, ex-beauty queen and fluff journalist who believes she is a serious journalist; investigative reporter Frank Fontana whom nobody takes seriously; Miles Silverberg, the twenty-seven year old producer who aspires to high management at the network and Phil, owner of a local tavern who is the only person apart from Bob Woodward who knows Deep Throat personally.

The Monday, December 3rd show concerned itself with the issue of sponsors bowing to public pressure to withdraw advertising. F.Y.I. planned a segment on AIDS and, specifically, the importance of condoms. The network was bowing

to pressure from a letter writer who threatened a boycott of sponsors. If Murphy was able to secure one sponsor, the show would run. The team at F.Y.I. anticipated the letter writer to be a bored, small minded housewife who would succumb to Murphy's charm and abandon her campaign. The letter writer turned out to be a highly organized professional campaigner with more contacts nationwide than Murphy and a powerful opponent. Murphy changed her strategy and flew to Chicago to meet with the one remaining sponsor to plead her case. The boycotting writer was also at the meeting and was getting on famously with the ultra-conservative CEO. It would have been easy for the show's writers to pit Murphy against the opposition, championing her cause and persuading the CEO to change his mind by her impassioned speech. Instead the writers set up an ultra-conservative CEO with dogs named Tricia and Milhouse, who idolized Spiro Agnew and Reagan and who was totally opposed to sex education, flag burning, etc. As the CEO and the letter writer chatter on about common passions, Murphy is resigned to failure and gets up to leave. The CEO then announces that he will be sponsoring the show and berates Murphy for her assumption that all conservatives are alike, with no individual opinions and it is a credit to the writers of "Murphy Brown" that they took the time to make the show clever as well as funny.

Although much of "Murphy Brown" focuses on Murphy's personal life, and there is not enough emphasis on the actual newsroom, the show is very effective. Often, real personalities such as Connie Chung or Dan Rather are referred to, for example, Jim Dial went on a sea cruise with Dan Rather and came back vowing to never speak to the man again. It pokes fun at the newscasters and it is this integration of real and fictional personalities that makes the show so funny. Most of the shows are focused on certain issues rather than the actual broadcasts, in fact rarely do they show a broadcast of F.Y.I. The show usually focuses on topical issues, and about journalism itself such as tabloid journalism, back-patting and ego-massaging between journalists, snobbery and self-indulgence. "Murphy Brown"

makes fun of journalists self-importance and it is this irreverence that makes it such enormous fun.

The most recent CBS offering, "WIOU," is a fairly effective one hour show that is both funny and somber. The style of the show is a combination of "Hill Street Blues" and "L.A. Law." There is an ensemble cast, each with ongoing story lines each week. The setting is a Chicago local news program WNDY which has earned the nick-name WIOU because of its impoverished budget. Hank Zaret is the new News Director who was brought in to restore WNDY ratings, and shares a romantic past with anchor Kelby Robinson who is "over the hill" as far as anchors go and is a serious journalist. Senior anchor Neil is a smug, lecherous incompetent who is more concerned with curing his temporary impotence with Taylor, a young, beautiful anchor he brought in as a replacement who is after his job. There is a young, arrogant, black reporter who is interested only in his TVQ and getting onto a major network. On the Wednesday, December 5th show he explains to a man who is trying to persuade him to cover the closing of a free health clinic that he is "into the homeless this week." There is also an aging, incompetent but lovable weatherman, an aspiring field producer who is too "soft" and ethical to report certain stories, a young editor who is infatuated with the field producer and some outside characters who fill in the necessary romantic angles and storylines.

"WIOU" is witty, well written and fairly successful at portraying the "other side" of the story. However, it fails on an important level in that by incorporating the styles of "L.A. Law" and "Hill Street Blues," it does not seem to be its own show—it lacks style. The derivivity of "WIOU" is so apparent that it is annoying and this is unfortunate because the characters are interesting, the storylines are good (if a little too emotional), and it is fascinating and satisfying to see a fairly reasonable facsimile of the goings on of a news station. Critics applauded this show even before it aired and it is a predicted hit so perhaps some of the early problems will be ironed out. However, a brand new show struggling to attract audience interest and

loyalty to a large cast would do well to eliminate some of the irritating distractions such as copycat music, copycat opening credits and copycat characters.

To compare "Murphy Brown" to "WIOU" would be inappropriate in the same way comparing an apple to an orange would be pointless. Simply, they are two different types with different objectives. However, on the basis of which show is more successful at what it is trying to achieve, "Murphy Brown" is surprisingly the more successful vehicle.



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